

Friendly competitors play an important role

Peter Murray, owner of Hidden Lane Landscaping & Design in Herndon, Virginia, has been in the industry 30 years and a PLANET member for 15. Since joining a PLANET peer group last year, he has attended two member meetings and participated on two conference calls. He said one of his company's goals this year is to break through the \$3 million threshold. In his words, "This year will be the year to really get things rolling."



Q. Peter, your company is well established. In fact, you mentioned that it was founded more than 50 years ago, and you've owned it for the past 20 years. What motivated you to join a peer group?

A. I joined for several reasons. Even though we have a long history and are well established in our market, we are just now evolving into a company that operates with a managerial structure. Other members in the group operate with managers, and we want to learn from them. We also look forward to sharing benchmarking data, being held accountable for set goals, and experiencing group camaraderie.

Q. Benchmarking and accountability are two very important tangibles that peer groups offer their members. Camaraderie, at least on the surface, seems less tangible. Why is it important for you?

A. Running a business is very exciting, but it can also take its toll on owners. At certain times of the year, it feels like for every two steps forward you take, you take another step backwards. It's good to know that you're not alone; that other owners have similar issues.

Q. What's your initial impression of your group?

A. From the very beginning, I felt there is a great chemistry among members. We are also similar in size, ranging anywhere from \$2 million and \$4 million in sales and we're all very motivated. Until I joined the group, I thought that our productivity level was good, that crews were efficient, and that we controlled costs. After two face-to-face meetings, it appears that we do a pretty good job in both areas and that's good to know.

Q. Peter, you want to learn more about developing a management structure. What do you bring to the table that could be equally valuable to the other peer group members?

A. Part of our productivity success comes from having customized reports that tell us exactly where we are on specific jobs. Over the years, we've learned to track what's important and to stay on top of our numbers every day. We've already shared many of these reports with the group. Sure, every company is different, and what works for us may not work for everyone. Still, it's always interesting and informative to find out how other companies operate.

Q. Advice to other people looking to join a peer group?

A. I believe that having a group with similar size members where everyone is motivated to grow is important. With that said, don't join a group unless you're willing to make a time commitment to travel and to prepare accurate numbers. To do otherwise is to waste other members' time.

Q. What else can you share with PLANET members who may be on the fence about joining a peer group?

A. I joined the group after it was formed. Again, I felt that the chemistry was right from the start and that we had so much in common. Being part of the group is almost like having your personal sounding board. Our meetings are very serious, dinners are a blast, and, afterwards, we break into smaller groups to continue conversations. Among all the benefits I've experienced so far, the most powerful one offered by the group is accountability. We've set our goals for the year and look forward to meeting them, thanks in large part to our "friendly competitors" urging us on. 🐾

