

# WHAT DO CUSTOMERS REALLY WANT?

By Bruce Wilson, Wilson-Oyler Group LLC

**W**ho hasn't heard "looks good" on a walk-through and then, out of the blue, lost the account? Hank Wilson, chief executive officer of Sunscape Landscaping in Austin, Texas, and a master of rapport, knows that no matter how good the professional relationship, customers don't always tell you what's bugging them. When it was his turn to host a meeting of The National Association of Landscape Professionals Internationals peer group in February, Wilson organized a client panel to uncover the truth.

The panel included commercial property and facility managers representing corporate, retail, HOA and mixed-use properties. But for all the segment diversity, it was clear that customer priorities were all the same. After a robust two hours, one thing was certain: one-size service does not fit all.

Some customers want the big picture and get straight to the point, others don't want to be rushed and appreciate detail. Whatever your customer's style (for example, whether they prefer text messages over email), becoming a more effective service partner relies on paying attention to subtle and not-so-subtle cues.

## DECODING CUSTOMER SERVICE RELATIONSHIPS

So, what do customers really want?

1. **A clean team**—The appearance of your crews and equipment matters.
2. **Simplicity**—Don't make things too complex. They want doing business with you to be easy. Make your presentations shorter and minimize the jargon.
3. **Accessibility**—They want you to be there for them 24/7.
4. **A consistent point of contact**—They don't like to be passed off to someone else. They want a regular problem-solver they can build a relationship with.
5. **Tokens of appreciation**—Cupcakes dropped off for no reason or lunch brought in for lunch-and-learns.
6. **Authenticity**—They want you to like them. If you don't, they'll know it no matter how hard you try to pretend.
7. **Assurance**—They want to know that you know what you're talking about.
8. **Integrity**—They like to know they're going to be treated fairly and are getting their money's worth.
9. **Dependability**—They want you to keep your promises and be reliable.
10. **Transparency**—They want to be kept abreast of the issues and problems: no surprises.
11. **Quality**—They expect quality and define it the same way you do.
12. **Full Disclosure**—They want proposals that include 'all in' costs: include sales tax!
13. **Documentation**—They like photos for diagnostic purposes and trouble-shooting.
14. **Uniqueness**—They want to see the difference in the service you provide compared to the other guy.
15. **Compatibility**—They want the personality of your organization to mesh with theirs.
16. **Visuals**—They like visual context offered by designers as a value-add.

17. **To know you understand their business**—They want you to understand their budget cycle and bid proactively, engage early, follow-up regularly, and stay on top of their process thresholds. They want you to make them look smarter to the people they report to.

18. **A proactive approach**—They want you to help them think proactively and long-term so they can plan, with recommendations for repairs/upgrades and capital improvements identified so they can budget and anticipate cost requirements over time. They want your proposal to sync with their specs—prepare a parallel proposal with better suggestions and recommendations if their specs need a different perspective.



**NALP INTERNATIONALS**

NALP Internationals peer group was formed in 2014 with a company from Canada making this group truly without

borders. Members include Hank Wilson, Sunscape Landscaping, Austin, Texas; Aric Budden, DBL, Phoenix, Ariz.; Mark Ackerson and his daughter, Shanna Ackerson, Ackerson Landscape, Kansas City, Mo.; brothers Todd and Chad Reinhart, Reinhart Landscape and Grounds Services/WeedMan, Bloomington,

Ill.; and Danny Milligan and his daughter and son, Jessica and Gordon Milligan, Strathmore Landscape, Montreal, QC, Canada. ▶

**ABOUT NALP PEER GROUPS**

NALP peer group members are senior executives from companies in non-competing markets formed around similar business models or specific issues and interests—the Internationals are all BOSS software users. For more information, contact program facilitator, **Bruce Wilson**, Wilson-Oyler Group at [bwilson@wilson-oyler.com](mailto:bwilson@wilson-oyler.com), or Joan Haller, NALP peer group administrator at [joan@landscapeprofessionals.org](mailto:joan@landscapeprofessionals.org).

# ACCESSIBILITY. CONVENIENCE. FLEXIBILITY.

Members of the National Association of Landscape Professionals have access to hundreds of computer-based testing centers located throughout the United States and Canada and at 30 international sites through a partnership with PSI/LaserGrade.

*Testing is available for the following designations:*

- **Landscape Industry Certified Manager** (formerly known as CLP)
- **Landscape Industry Certified Interior Technician** (formerly known as CLT-I)
- **Landscape Industry Certified Horticultural Technician** (formerly known as COLP)
- **Landscape Industry Certified Lawn Care Technician** (formerly known as CTP-CSL)
- **Landscape Industry Certified Lawn Care Technician - National**

Details on how to register for computer-based testing are available in the Certification section at [landscapeprofessionals.org](http://landscapeprofessionals.org) or call the NALP office at 800-395-2522.



“Taking the certification exam at a PSI computer testing center was extremely convenient. It allowed me to take the test at a time that fit my schedule and when I felt most comfortable. The facility is high tech, and the proctor administering the test was helpful and accommodating. I would recommend this avenue of test taking to anyone.”

—**Michael McShane**,  
Landscape Industry Certified,  
Green Source Solutions, LLC