

»»» People First, a DEI initiative

# CULTIVATING GROWTH TOOLKIT



NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION OF  
LANDSCAPE  
PROFESSIONALS

**FOUNDATION**



## Cultivating Growth Strategy

### *Developing a Successful Upward Mobility Plan*

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Providing opportunities for employees to develop in your organization will benefit your company in many ways – your people will stay longer, changes in your organization will be easier to implement, employee engagement will go up, and you will save time and money in recruiting.

When considering this toolkit, it is critical that you evaluate your own organization through a clear lens. It is important that you consider how any of these suggestions might work within your organization as you ultimately will want to do what makes sense for you.

In this toolkit you can expect to find information on ways to provide your employees growth paths and upward mobility, as well as tips on how to use these to increase engagement.

#### **SCOPE**

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- A collection of resources for underrepresented workers to identify entrepreneurship opportunities, including education on what opportunities exist within the industry
- Upward mobility training
- Building a professional network

## Opportunities within the Landscape and Lawn Care Industry

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Educating and providing opportunities for growth and upward mobility will support retention within organizations and the industry. Think about all of the professionals that you know who have made a career change or moved on from the industry because they could not envision or see opportunity for themselves!

There are multiple ways to help employees cultivate their skills and take their careers to the next level. Supporting employees who want to be entrepreneurial or grow within your organization is a key way to ensure that you have long-term retention.

### Offering mentorship opportunities

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- Fosters a culture of continuous learning
- Gets managers involved
- Allows specific focus on training for leadership roles

## Mentorship Opportunities

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Providing mentorship opportunities to your employees will increase dedication, loyalty, and productivity in your organization. Mentoring employees as they progress through their careers will increase their confidence and their longevity with your organization. Mentors also benefit from the mentorship relationship. Acting as a mentor helps build leadership and management skills, offers the mentor a unique perspective, and can assist with organizational planning.

### Building a mentorship program

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- A good mentor is someone who is motivated, energized, and cares about developing others. Mentors must care about the mentee's success and growth. Mentors must be able to commit the time to build the relationship - as a mentorship is first, and foremost, the bridge that is responsible for attempting to foster a strong relationship for both the mentor and mentee. Both parties will need to agree to the amount of time spent on the mentorship and take that agreement seriously.
- Make sure there is a connection. Mentorship relationships work best when the mentor and mentee share common ground - whether it be backgrounds, career trajectory, or facing similar challenges. Mentors and mentees need some similarity to build the relationship from, to discuss, or to work through.
- Set Goals. Goal setting is essential. Mentees should be working towards a goal that the mentor can assist with - a mentor will only help if they know what the mentee hopes to accomplish.

Mentoring can benefit employees at all career stages. Employees hoping to grow within a career field, or into management roles will benefit from the expertise of someone who has worked and grown in that field. A business owner can benefit from mentoring with a more experienced business owner, or a peer group that experiences similar challenges.

As a business owner or leader, you can set up a structured mentorship program within your organization or offer opportunities for employees to match with mentors in your career field (but not necessarily your organization). A mentorship program within your organization may include various levels of mentors and mentees, or it may be one manager or leader mentoring many different employees. Your program will be unique to your organization - do not be afraid to think outside of the box and try something new. Your employees and organization will benefit from your ingenuity.

## Mentor Program Checklist

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- Establish a list of mentors
  - Consider if your mentors are bi-lingual and pair them with mentees accordingly.
- Attract mentees to sign up for the program
- Pair mentors/mentees
- Establish a timeline for the program.
- Provide expectations around how often mentors/mentees should meet, what is supposed to be accomplished through the program, and any measurables you want to track to understand the program's impact.
- Establish guidelines around activities for the mentors and mentees
- Set up an evaluation for both mentors/mentees at the end of the program.

NALP has created an Internship Guide with sample guidelines, schedules, and evaluations that may be beneficial to you when setting up a new mentorship program. The full guide can be found here: [NALP Internship Guide](#).

### Mentorship guidelines recommended in the guide include the following

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- Interview your mentee to discuss personal and professional goals, hobbies and interests, and specific goals and expectations for the mentorship.
- Schedule weekly meetings, same day and time, to discuss previous week's work and progress, and set expectations for the following week.
- Evaluate throughout the mentorship. Both mentor and mentee should evaluate progress and performance of the program and be open to the feedback that is provided.

## Growth Opportunities for Women

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Although women make up 47% of the national labor force, they account for only 8% of the landscape industry labor force, as reported in the [NALP Foundation's 2021 Workforce Demographic Study](#). Even though there are more women now than ever working in the landscape industry, there is room for growth. Women are a valuable but underrepresented workforce population within this industry and increasing your female employees will positively affect your organization.

### Recommendations

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- **Show female employees that they have a future with your organization.** Career progression and training are important to women and women have proven to be more loyal employees than men, with lower attrition rates. Developing your female employee's business, leadership, and managerial skills will allow you to promote more women into leadership roles - which will show that you value women workers and leaders, and make your organization look more appealing to female applicants.
- **Support your female staff.** Find out what they need, discuss support with your employees, and find out how you can help them continue to work. Women are much more likely to be responsible for childcare, and other family obligations, which can very often keep women from working. Discussing support needs and being flexible with your staff will allow more women to work. Support could look like extended family leave policies, flexible start and end times, or offering leadership training for your female staff.
- **Networking is a wonderful way for women to support each other** while working in a male-dominated industry. Seeking out other women who are dealing with similar work cultures, education and training opportunities, and career progression obstacles will help your female staff build relationships with others in the industry and share ideas and best practices of what is working for them at their organizations. If you aren't able to offer this at your organization, [NALP's Women in Landscape Network](#) is a highly engaged and diverse networking group with over 1,500 members. Networks like this are a great place to discuss advocacy techniques that have worked for others and link up with career path mentors and coaches.
- **Supporting your female employees** by offering flexibility and better benefits is a great start but providing an appropriate workplace culture is also needed. With the industry being primarily male, men in the workforce must be accepting and encouraging of women in the workplace. Building a team that includes women will increase productivity, decrease turnover, and create an overall well-rounded team. Women often bring "soft skills" to the team - ex: empathy, optimism, and passion - that create higher rates of job satisfaction for all members.
- **Your organizational culture is set from the top** if leadership is welcoming and encouraging of female employees, your other employees' attitudes and behavior will follow. If management allows rude comments, sexist behavior, or an overall unwelcoming environment, it will have a negative effect for your employee retention, and that reputation will become widely known and influence future female applicants.

## Intrapreneurship Opportunities

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Finding and keeping great employees is key to your organization's growth. If you are constantly having to hire and backfill positions, you're less likely to experience your full growth potential. Identifying, training, and offering opportunities to dedicated, diligent employees is a great way to help maintain their loyalty. There are business opportunities within the landscape industry, but not everyone can or wants to be a business owner.

Growing your employees with intrapreneurship refers to encouraging your ambitious employees to function as entrepreneurs within your organization - creating new business, innovative product development, or converting unique ideas or concepts into products or services. Allowing, and even promoting, your employees to think freely, and flex their creativity skills will allow them to grow within, and for your organization.

### How can you encourage intrapreneurship within your organization?

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- Give employees time and space to be creative. You cannot expect employees to provide new, innovative ideas if they have a full workload or schedule. Schedule time to devote solely to the creative process.
- Discuss what problems need to be addressed with your team. Innovative ideas are great, but if they do not solve a problem you are facing, they may not really be beneficial. Give your team direction - starting with the problem that needs to be solved and include some examples of ideas that you are looking for. Set boundaries and let the creative juices flow.
- Recognize and praise people for their promising ideas. People work harder if they feel appreciated. If you want to encourage employee input and innovation, you must communicate and acknowledge their hard work.

Investing in and supporting an intrapreneurship within your organization has many benefits for the company - including employee growth and development, engagement, and productivity. Intrapreneurship allows employees to stretch and grow while keeping them engaged.

## Goal Setting with Employees

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When it comes to career goals, employees often know what they want - a promotion, develop new skills, expand their education, etc. - but having employees set goals alone often leaves the employee with no action plan to achieve their goals. Goal setting with your employees allows you an opportunity to plan a course of action to attain the desired outcomes.

### Goal setting with your employees

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- Will open up lines of communication, allowing your staff to feel valued and give management a chance to build rapport with team members.
- Will give you a chance to explain your expectations and create an action plan that you both agree to - which is a more cooperative way of managing employees.

### Benefits of Setting Employee Goals

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- Increased Productivity
- Improved Employee Engagement
- Greater Motivation
- Increase Job Satisfaction
- Greater Retention Rates

Setting goals with your employees will vary depending on your employees' needs and specific personal goals. Goal setting is often attached to the performance review process - but goals should be discussed more often than annually. Employees should set short- and long-term goals with realistic and measurable steps to achievement. These goals should have a timeframe for completion and the deadline will set your follow-up needs.

Goals should also be, and remain, relevant to the employee and to the company. They should align with the organization's objectives and mission. If an employee sets goals that are not relevant to their position, or will not benefit the organization, they probably are not goals worth working towards. Managers should discuss the goal's relevance with employees when they are being set.

Managers should acknowledge, or even reward, employees who meet their goals, and work closely with employees who do not. Find out what support employees who do not meet their goals need and help them assess their action plans to move towards progress. The goals, and action plans, are working documents with room for change. Allowing for flexibility and providing support are two key factors in a successful employee goal-setting program.

## GOAL SETTING AND REVIEW FORM EXAMPLE

EMPLOYEE'S NAME (LAST, FIRST, M.I.)		TODAY'S DATE
<b>WHAT IS GOING WELL?</b> (Talk about things that are positive and areas where expectations have been met/exceeded)		
Employee's Response:		
Manager's Response:		
<b>WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT?</b> (An opportunity to talk about tools, programs, etc. that someone may need to perform their job more efficiently. Identify areas of improvement)		
Employee's Response:		
Manager's Response:		
<b>PREVIOUS GOALS</b>		
GOAL	TIMELINE/COMPLETION	MEASURABLE OUTCOME
<b>NEW/CONTINUING GOALS</b>		
GOAL	TIMELINE/COMPLETION	MEASURABLE OUTCOME
Employee's Response:		
Manager's Response:		

### Things to remember during your check-in

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- This time is most valuable when both people are able to concentrate and not multi-tasking. Each person, the manager, and the employee should be actively listening and providing feedback, thoughts, and opinions.
- You should be discussing what is going well, what needs improvement, and what to do moving forward.
- If you run out of time, you can set another time to resume the conversation!

### Keep goals SMART

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- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Time-based

## Upward Mobility Training

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Upward mobility training refers to training for promotion within your organization. Within two years of starting a new position, if not sooner, employees will begin looking to move further up on their career ladder. Investing time and training into your employees will benefit your business and your employees in many ways:

- Employees who have opportunities for growth at work will feel more valued and fulfilled with their employer.
- Training and advancing employees within your organization will minimize employee turnover and the need to fill positions from outside organizations - saving time, energy, and money spent on recruitment and hiring campaigns.
- Low employee turnover means your team members will work together longer - and will work better together than a team with constant turnover - proving to be more productive and efficient in their work.

Upward mobility training can encompass many things - training and development programs, mentoring, scholarships for outside education, and job shadowing are all options that you could implement. It is critical to ensure that this training encompasses a diverse segment of employees at your organization.

Creating a standard career path progression will help current and new employees understand the expectations and requirements to reach each level and offer avenues with which to meet those requirements.

Mentoring and employee coaching are great ways to keep employees involved and motivated. Employees that feel valued and invested will be more productive and satisfied team members. You could set up a formal mentorship program that employees apply to enter, or you could set-up weekly or bi-weekly coaching sessions to discuss goals, business and personal, along with any needs your employees might have that are not being met. Checking-in individually with your staff will help to ensure their satisfaction within your business.

Your employee upward mobility training program will be unique to your business, but there is a lot of valuable insight and advice shared from other NALP members and business leaders available to you as inspiration to get started, linked below in the Continued Learning Opportunities.

## Continued Learning Opportunities

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NALP offers training and education opportunities for their members. Their website training page can be found here: [NALP Online Training](#), and they've recently created an online, self-paced Landscape Management Certificate Program, which you can read more about here: [Landscape Management Certificate Program Helps Produce Qualified Labor Pool](#).

NALP's The Edge magazine and Growing in the Green Industry podcast offer various articles, interviews, and discussions regarding training, professional development, and career progression experiences from other landscape business leaders. Some of the articles and podcasts are linked below:

[Putting in the Time and \\$\\$: A Commitment to Continuing Education with Palmer Higgins](#)

[Team Building: Selecting Education that Interests Employees](#)

[Team Building: Plan Your Training](#)

[Team Building: Professional Development Options for Employees](#)

[Team Building: Implementing Effective Employee Coaching](#)

[How I Do It: Creating a Leadership Development Program](#)

[The Importance of Mentors and How to Grow in Your Landscape Industry Career](#)

[Level Up: New Castle Lawn & Landscape Focuses on the Profitability of Their Core Services](#)

## Building a Professional Network

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Networking is a key component of a successful career and allows individuals to connect with others in their industry. But networking is more than just having professional contacts - it is building relationships, and relationships aren't built overnight. As a leader and manager, you should advise your employees on the importance of networking and train them in how to best nurture those relationships.

There are a few ways to build a professional network, but all of them require building and nurturing new relationships. Employees may like to focus on online groups, networking groups within your community, or industry specific groups ([National Association of Landscape Professionals](#)) that host online forums and in-person events – all of which benefit the employee and your organization.

### Here are some tips to share with your team on building their professional network

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- **Reach out to the right people** - Build relationships with people who can help you make a career move. Past and present colleagues and bosses are particularly good contacts but also include friends in similar professions, alumni from college, people from school, and more generally - anyone who can help you.
- **Stay connected with your contacts** - Do not just contact people when you need them. Invest in each relationship and try to stay in touch, even if it is just the occasional message to check-in. The stronger your relationships are with your contacts, the more they will be willing to help you.
- **Build your professional network online** - There are several online professional network services, such as LinkedIn, which are useful tools for staying in touch with people and for making new connections. [The National Associate of Landscape Professionals](#) currently maintains three networking groups for members - Young Professionals Network, Women in Landscape Network, and Latino Landscape Network. Coming soon, Veterans in Landscape Network and Lawncare Industry!
- **Attend professional networking events** - Networking face-to-face is highly effective. If you have the chance to engage in professional networking activities, or go to events, take advantage of the opportunity. They are intended to help people build mutually beneficial professional relationships. There are many professional networking groups you can join, online and in-person that hold events for members to meet and connect.
- **Favor your contacts** - You cannot expect to only receive the professional networking benefits - what goes around, comes around. If you have a chance to help someone, take it. Point your contacts in the direction of job vacancies and share other valuable information.

Teaching and encouraging your employees to network will benefit your business, as well as the employee. As an employee continues to grow within your organization, their network could become an important recruitment tool and a great place to cultivate new business. Your organization will benefit from any employee's well-nurtured network.

### **Here are ways that you can support your employees networking efforts**

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- Provide business cards for your employees.
- Advertise and encourage attendance at local networking events.
- Highlight networking opportunities for a variety and diverse segments of other professionals.
- Ask employees to attend career fairs and community events as a representative of your company.
- Provide company polo shirts, or discuss dress codes, prior to the event.
- Invite employees to join you at industry events or professional networking groups.
- Highlight employee profiles on your website.
- Encourage employees to create and update LinkedIn profiles, and to use social media as a tool for networking.

### **Continued Learning Opportunities**

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- [The Power of Networking](#)
- [Why Networking Matters and Where to Do It](#)

## About the National Association of Landscape Professionals Foundation

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For more than two decades, the NALP Foundation (a 501c3 organization) has supported education, research, and scholarships to strengthen the future of the landscape and lawn care industry. These efforts are furthered through programs that connect educators, students, communities, and industry professionals by developing initiatives to build and sustain a stronger industry.

The Foundation continues their mission to strengthen the industry through the following initiatives:

### Diversity and Inclusion Project

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1. Workforce Development Survey (October 2021)
2. Building a Diverse Workforce Toolkit (September 2022)
3. Retaining a Diverse Workforce Toolkit (September 2022)
4. Cultivating Growth Toolkit (February 2023)

### High School Programs

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1. National High School Competition through SkillsUSA
2. Connecting with students (k-12), in the classroom, virtually, to provide insight about professional careers in the landscape and lawn care industry through Pathful Connect

### Benefits of Healthy Landscapes

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1. Promoting the benefits of properly designed, constructed, and managed landscapes
2. Developing and applying an ecosystem framework to measure the economic, social, and environmental value of specific landscapes

The Foundation welcomes all contributions and appreciates your support.

Donations can be submitted online via the QR code below. Or you can request a donation form via email, [foundation@landscapeprofessionals.org](mailto:foundation@landscapeprofessionals.org).

If you prefer to talk with someone directly, **please call 703.456.4212.**

