10 TIPS TO HELP MANAGE CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

ecoPRO Certified Professionals Share How They Engage & Inform Clients In Their Sustainable Landscape Communication. Knowledge. Partnership.

1. Honesty
My most helpful tool in discussing expectations for sustainable landscape management is honesty. Along with my experience, I communicate what is possible and what is unrealistic within a given budget and/or timeline. I explain that landscape management is a three part relationship; the maintenance company, the owner and the landscape itself. It takes time to mature and learn each other’s ways.

Gregory Smaus CPH, EPC
Maintenance Manager | Rock Solid Landscapes

2. Passion & Knowledge
The biggest tool in getting our clients on board is passion and knowledge. The more passionate and knowledgeable we can be, the more our clients trust us to direct them properly. ecoPRO certification is another tool to express to our clients our commitment to best practices.

Kryssie Maybay, LLA, EPC
Landscape Architect, Sublime Garden Design

3. Patience & Tolerance
Sustainable landscapes are about creating “systems” that over the long run begin to take care of themselves. As such, we have to learn to back away and let Nature take the lead. This requires us to see things the way Nature sees things rather than our own preconceived notion of what a landscape means exclusively to us. But we are part of a sustainable landscape so we must also get what we need. So this is the dilemma... How do we get what we need while allowing Nature to take the lead? We are really good at expressing our desires and we carry them out with lawn mowers, pruning tools, rototillers and the like but Nature doesn’t shout out what she needs. We turn her soil and prune her limbs and yet she remains silent. And in that silence is the answer. When we listen we begin to realize that Nature has value independent of the value we may place on her. That leaf disease on the Dogwood Tree or weed in the lawn has a value to Nature even if we see it as a problem to solve. And we start to see things from her perspective and we adjust our practices over time to honor her. And then it happens -- we are doing less but enjoying our landscape more and things are magically beginning to take care of themselves. And all it took was a little patience and tolerance.

Bill Peregrine, EPC
Earthdance Organics

4. Involve The Client & Educate Them
We involve the client in the process and educate them. For example, we tell our clients that because we value you and your family’s health (pets, etc), our own health and the health of the ecosystem, we are launching a pesticide and herbicide free program. We explain that we are going to monitor their site for pests and work with cutting edge scientific information to manage these through nature based and sustainable methods - such as encouraging predators, beneficial insects, instead of spraying the pests. Most people will appreciate the information and will be willing to work with you.

Zsofia Pastzor, CPH, EPC
Innovative Landscape Technologies, Inc.

5. Communication & Partnership
We let our customers know that using best practices and implementing more natural methods require more labor and that we will work with them through the process.

Linda Carroll & Jeff Carroll, EPC
Jefferson Landscaping

6. Reduce Costs & Protect Your Investment
In light of the most recent drought, we tell our clients we want to protect their investment and reduce the load on our dwindling water supply. We explain to them that we will reduce the need for irrigation through sustainable planting methods and mulching practices. This will cut back on water costs, but will need to spend a little extra on plants, mulch, or an updated irrigation system.

Zsofia Pastzor, CPH, EPC
Innovative Landscape Technologies, Inc.
7. More Information & Additional Incentives
Many of our clients do not have enough information on sustainable practices to know that some of their current or previous practices are detrimental to achieving a sustainable site. Everyone wants to do the right thing and once clients are given the information they are typically excited to try the new approach.

Kryssie Maybay, LLA, EPC
Landscape Architect, Sublime Garden Design

8. Ask For Client Participation
We participate in the pollinator and wildlife corridor programs in our city. As a company, we ask that our clients join in as well and rethink how their site functions as a wildlife habitat. We want to make sure the farmers around us have enough pollinators and our urban food farms can grow produce as easily. To achieve this we will let plants grow and go into flower or even seed more readily and increase the native plants on site so the birds and insects can find food and shelter easily. And, if someone is not open at all - maybe it is best to drop them from your client list. If you stand by your values, the world will stand by you, too.

Zsofia Pastzor, CPH, EPC
Innovative Landscape Technologies, Inc.

9. Additional Incentives
We also offer additional incentives for using organic fertilizers and maintenance. Use of synthetics voids our plant warranty. We require that our contractors that install our work use sustainable methods whenever possible as well. That way our clients are hearing the same message from both us (their designer) and the contractor. This provides a unified message and expresses the importance to them.

Kryssie Maybay, LLA, EPC
Landscape Architect, Sublime Garden Design

10. Educate the Client
appearance between a typical high-N synthetic diet and normal nutrient availability that is managed with organic fertilizers is paramount. It is necessary as well to describe or show examples of turf in a climax condition where there are 4-5 species of grass present and often broadleaf weeds. Helping them understand that mulch is a critical weed control tool and that weeds should be tolerated as long as they are controlled prior to going to seed is also helpful. If the client accepts these realities a transition can be effected without breaking the bank. However, the lower their tolerance for these conditions the higher the price tag.

Will Bailey CLP/CLT/EPC/ISA
Signature Landscape Services, LLC

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