

TIPS FOR TECHS

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PART ONE

ACCOUNT EFFICIENCY

For plant techs, it's all about time. At least, sometimes it seems that way. Efficiency is the key to getting everything done in the amount of time you're given.

1

ALWAYS KEEP A LOOK OUT FOR WAYS TO SHAVE OFF TIME.

Even if you've gone into the account with a good map and summary, you never know when you'll find a way to reduce your time.

2

MOVE THROUGH THE ACCOUNT ONE TIME & ONE TIME ONLY.

Do everything to each plant as you come to it, in order. That means, you'll need to have all the tools and supplies you need going in.

3

KEEP COMPLETE AND ACCURATE NOTES.

Write down the tools or supplies you don't usually carry that you'll need for the next service along with the chemical and moisture usage of troublesome plants.

4

CUT DOWN ON “STAND AROUND TIME.”

Standing around doing nothing will seriously erode efficiency. Start maintenance on the plants while the water fills, check for bugs while you turn plants, and so on.

5

DEVELOP A SERVICE ROUTINE AND APPLY IT TO EACH PLANT.

Example: 1. Inspect while you're walking toward the plant, 2. Feel and look for soil moisture, 3. Trim-turn-trim (keep those eyes going; look for bugs and dead stuff), 4. Water, 5. Spray/treat for pests or pathogens. 6. Special work (i.e. prune, fix top dressing, etc.) 7. Clean plant, plant container, floor, table, etc. 8. Look back as you walk away

6

MEASURE WITH FINGERS (INSTEAD OF TAPE MEASURE)

One less thing to carry, right? For instance, when I stretch out my hand, the distance between the tip of my thumb and the tip of my ring finger is 8". I can use this to size anything I need to know.

7

USE FERTILIZER CONCENTRATE

When it comes time to fertilize, just squirt some of the concentrate onto the surface of the soil and water it in. Use a few drops on a small plant and a healthy squirt on a big one. This works for sub-irrigation also, if you have a set up where you might not want to fertilize all the plants the same. I use regular granular fertilizer mixed with water (1 part fertilizer to 2 parts water). Using a clear spray bottle lets you see if all the fertilizer is dissolved.

PART TWO

ACCOUNT EFFECTIVENESS

With a limited time frame and a to-do list that sometimes seems endless, it is important for plant technicians to not only work efficiently, but also effectively.

1

CHECK IN WITH CLIENT ON ARRIVAL & BEFORE DEPARTURE.

Let your client know you're there, what you did, how things were, and when they need to sign a service receipt. Remember to smile and look them in the eye.

2

KEEP YOUR OWN MANAGEMENT TOTALLY IN THE LOOP.

Make sure management knows what's going on with your accounts every day. Request replacements promptly and keep up with the order status – diplomatically, of course.

3

BE ATTENTIVE TO PLANTS' NEED FOR CONSISTENCY.

Plants just seem to do better when they get the same care service to service – the same amount of moisture and aeration in the soil is especially important.

4

MAKE YOUR SERVICE ROUTINE AUTOMATIC.

This was listed in the tips on efficiency, and it's worth mentioning it again – look, feel, trim/turn/trim, water, treat, special work, clean, and look back.

5

USE THE NUMERICAL MOISTURE LEVEL (NML) SYSTEM.

This is really helpful in keeping records and in communicating specifics with other people about a plant. (See next page for detailed explanation).

6

PROACTIVELY SPOT PROBLEMS & FIX THEM RIGHT AWAY.

Confront each plant expecting to find problems. Your soap and water spray is your best friend – it will control most bugs if you catch them soon enough.

7

GO EASY WITH SPRAY-ON FINISHES.

We pretty much agree that conventional leaf shine products are a no-no. Dusters and hand wiping are still the best way to keep plants clean and achieve a natural shine.

8

DON'T FERTILIZE TOO MUCH.

In a few cases, plants in full sun all day may need fertilizing every month. However, four times a year for high light, two to three times for medium light, and once a year for low light will be sufficient.

NUMERICAL MOISTURE LEVEL (NML) SYSTEM

NML 10: 100% saturated – “over saturated” - soil muddy, dripping

NML 9: 90% saturated – “extremely saturated” – soil sticky, water can be squeezed out.

NML 8: 80% saturated – “fully saturated” – soil molds perfectly in the shape of your hand, holds together until pushed apart, water can be squeezed out

NML 7,6: 70-60% saturated – “moderately saturated” – soil molds in the shape of your hand, falls apart easily when touched

NML 5,4: 50-40% saturated – “moderately aerated” – only parts of soil mold into the shape of closed fist

NML 3: 30% saturated – “well aerated” – soil does not mold into fist shape but small clods stay together

NML 2,1: 20-10% saturated – “fully aerated” – squeezed soil stays completely loose, but is still cool to the touch

NML 0: 0 saturation – “bone dry” – soil runs through your hand like sand, feels hard and scratchy

PART THREE

MAKING WORK ENJOYABLE

So you want to have fun at your job? Crazy concept, right? But look, if you're a plant tech and you're not enjoying it, you're probably not going to be one very long.

1

TAKE PLEASURE IN HOW YOUR PLANTS, & ACCOUNTS, LOOK.

If they look beautiful, you can take credit for it and that makes you feel good. If they don't look beautiful, fix them – then you'll feel good.

2

AVOID AS MUCH STRESS AS POSSIBLE.

Maybe you need to learn more about plant care, perhaps you need to discuss routing with your super, or maybe you just need to breathe. Figure out the cause and address the issue.

3

HAVE ALL THE TOOLS AND SUPPLIES YOU NEED.

But don't take in more than you need. For instance, don't lug in a water machine for an account with five plants. It's more hassle than help. And don't forget to use your notebook.

4

DEVELOP GOOD ROUTINES AND USE THEM.

Example of a good routine might look like this: look, feel, trim/turn/trim, water, treat, special work, clean, look back.

5

DON'T WORK WITHOUT A BREAK.

Even if you don't like to eat lunch (seems strange, but it happens,) stop working and relax for a while every day. It's healthy to take a mental break once in a while.

6

LEARN ABOUT HORTICULTURE.

The more you learn about plants, the happier you'll be, the more useful you'll be to your employers, and the more helpful you'll be to your interiorscape clients.

7

ALLOW TIME FOR INTERACTION WITH PEOPLE AROUND YOU.

A smile and a "hi" go a long way. Listen politely to questions and try to answer in as clear and concise a way as you can or promise to find the answer if you don't know it.

8

BE CAREFUL.

Whether you are driving or walking, try to always be aware of things around you. Pay attention to your center of gravity, avoid sudden twists and precarious balance, and use caution when sticking fingers into soil.

THANK YOU!

DON'T FORGET TO SHARE

