

Lean on me

New Englander credits consultants and mentors for helping him boost business and think about the big picture

BY JOHN WALSH | Contributor

Jon Crandall isn't doing it alone. He has help, and he's glad for it.

Crandall, president of Peabody MA-based **JC Landscaping**, credits several consultants and mentors for helping him think ahead and strategize rather than get lost in the day-to-day operation of his company.

Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO), Strategic Coach and Weather Works are a few of the companies that have helped propel Crandall's snow removal business revenue from less than \$450,000 three years ago to \$1.1 million last year.

Crandall, who started his business in high school 12 years ago, met painter Jim Kaloutas through EO. Back then, Kaloutas' painting company generated just less than \$1 million. Now it generates about a \$10 million.

"Jim has been a great mentor," he says.

Crandall, who became involved with EO about five years ago, gets a lot out of the group's meetings because of high-caliber speakers—such as the CEO of Dunkin' Donuts—who talk about cash flow, human resources and other aspects of running a business.

"The biggest thing I've learned is to not work *in* the business, but work *on* the business," he says. "I was working in the field



with the crew, but learned to pull away and focus on advertising, sales and HR."

For two years, Strategic Coach has helped Crandall set and reach goals—from as short as a three-month goal out to five-year goals. The program is helping Crandall determine where he wants to be in the short and long term.

For example, it helped Crandall put together a marketing plan for prospecting 100 customers who would be interested in higher-end snow service. He sent out three postcards to them. The third included a URL that, when entered on a computer, showed a prospective customer a video geared toward each of its needs.

"We just completed that and received several requests to bid on properties," he says.

Weather Works helps Crandall by providing detailed weather forecasting. Weather Works sends daily reports to Crandall that he, in turn, can send to his customers. Crandall and his employees also take advantage of Weather Works' customized web site for JC Landscaping.

"They allow us to prepare better, and

we can communicate to customers so they know what to expect in the morning," he says. "The monthly fee is easily justifiable."

Crandall also hired an outside controller to help with the company's metrics. The controller is looking at the company's five-year plan, and is putting controls in place to measure where the company is and how it's going to reach its goals. The controller will help Crandall measure the efficiency of his employees, too.

Crandall joined SIMA in April, and as part of the association's Buddy Program was introduced to mentor Rich Arlington III, CSP, of Rich Arlington & Associates.

Relationship building doesn't end with consultants and mentors, he notes. It extends to employees and clients.

"It's all about keeping everyone happy and successful," Crandall says.

JC Landscaping, which maintains more than 5 million square feet of property and employs as many as 50 people, has a 98% customer retention rate.

Crandall says he's not interested in micromanaging employees, many of whom had their own business at one point. Rather, he wants them to run their minibusinesses within JC Landscaping.

To help foster those strong relationships, Crandall showed his appreciation for employees and vendors by chartering a 120-ft. cruise boat for them this year. Last year, Crandall took his entire company whitewater rafting.

"We feel if your relationships are strong and healthy, then great service—and profit—will naturally follow." **SB**

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JC LANDSCAPING

2008 snow and ice revenue:
\$1.1 million

Number of accounts: 36

Industry experience: 13 years

2008-09 season snow/ice events: 7/12

2008-09 season snowfall: 62 inches