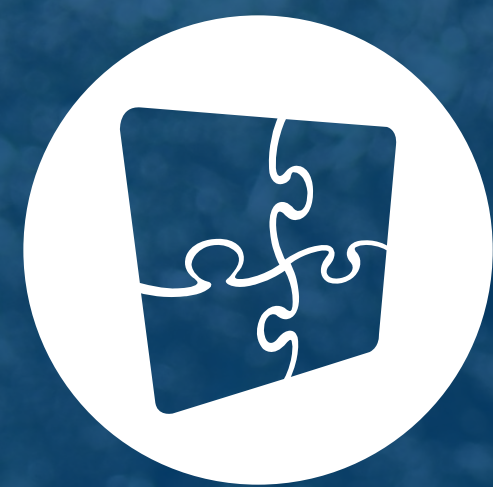




RealGreen[®]
by WORKWAVE[®]

KEEP YOUR CREW FRESH:

8 Ways to Prevent Burnout in Lawn Care



Maybe it starts with a barely noticeable change in attitude. A few late starts here and there. More frequent call-outs. Some no-shows. Then, finally, your formerly eager employee is seemingly nowhere to be found, and the rest of your team is struggling to pick up the slack. Employee burnout strikes again.

The physical demands of outdoor work, long peak-season hours and repetitive tasks create the perfect storm for employee burnout. With average turnover in the industry hovering between 28-36%¹, situations like this play out in lawn care and landscaping companies across the U.S. every day. Plus, when every burned-out employee who quits costs you twice their annual salary in recruitment, training and lost productivity², it's essential to your bottom line to make sure your employees avoid the burnout trap.

In this guide, we'll cover the early warning signs of employee burnout, proven prevention strategies and actionable steps **TO CREATE A WORKPLACE THAT KEEPS YOUR BEST PEOPLE ENGAGED – EVEN DURING THE MOST DEMANDING SEASONS.**

¹ <https://www.zippia.com/lawn-care-worker-jobs/demographics/>

² <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/247391/fixable-problem-costs-businesses-trillion.aspx>



UNDERSTANDING BURNOUT IN THE GREEN INDUSTRY

What Employee Burnout Really Looks Like

Everyone's tired after a long day of work; burnout is deeper than that. Here are the telltale signs to look out for in your crews:

- **Physical exhaustion from demanding outdoor work** shows up when your best workers start moving like they're underwater. Tasks that used to take 30 minutes now take an hour. They're constantly sore, and rest doesn't help anymore.
- **Mental fatigue from manual, repetitive tasks** means workers who used to nail perfect edges now rush through jobs. They forget customer requests and make mistakes they never made before. Detail work suffers. Headaches caused by malfunctioning software lead to further burnout.
- **Emotional detachment from work quality** is a major hurdle to overcome. These employees stop caring about results. They do the bare minimum and don't suggest improvements or solve problems. The pride is gone. This can happen gradually and be hard to detect at first – but if you have a former all-star employee who used to go the extra mile but now simply executes based on immediate directions, it could be a burnout red flag.
- **Increased absenteeism and tardiness** become the new normal. Monday and Friday sick days multiply. They show up late and leave early whenever possible.

Unique Challenges in Lawn Care/Landscaping

This industry's seasonal and physical nature creates burnout faster than many others.

- **Seasonal workload intensity** can mean 60-hour weeks for months straight. There's no gradual ramp-up. Spring hits and everyone's working overtime until fall.
- **Weather-dependent stress** makes everything unpredictable, turning that already grueling 60 hour workweek into even longer days and nights spent in the office. Rain wipes out three days of work. Then you're cramming everything into two brutal days. Heat makes simple jobs dangerous.
- **Physical demands and safety concerns** wear people down. Heavy machinery, awkward positions, chemical exposure. The injury risk never goes away, nor does the legal and ethical responsibility to keep your team safe.
- **Long hours during peak season** destroy work-life balance exactly when workers need recovery most. Twelve-hour days become standard. Weekends might disappear.
- **Repetitive nature of many tasks** creates mental monotony that's hard to break. Same routes, same motions, same procedures every day. If your team is relying on manual paperwork processes or fighting with outdated or ineffective software, it just compounds the feelings of frustration and boredom.

THE TRUE COST OF BURNOUT TO YOUR BUSINESS

Burnout hits your bottom line harder than most owners realize.

- **High turnover rates and recruitment costs** create an expensive hamster wheel. Job postings, interviews, background checks and drug testing cost money before new hires earn a dime. Again, replacing someone who leaves typically costs double their annual salary – a resource hit that can quickly become insurmountable.
- **Training expenses for constant new hires** multiply the pain. New workers need extra time to become productive while earning full wages. Your experienced people spend time training instead of making money.
- **Decreased work quality and customer satisfaction** kill revenue. Burned-out workers make more mistakes and work slower. That means callbacks, refunds and angry reviews that damage your reputation.
- **Increased workers' compensation claims** follow exhausted workers. Tired people get hurt more often. Claims spike and insurance premiums follow.
- **Lost institutional knowledge** hurts when experienced workers quit. They know customer quirks, equipment tricks and efficient shortcuts. That knowledge walks out the door with them, and if you don't have information stored in a central database (like a CRM), it's gone for good.
- **Impact on team morale and company culture** creates a negative feedback loop. Good workers quit and dump more work on whoever stays, burning out the remaining team faster.

HOW MUCH DID BURNOUT AFFECT YOUR BUSINESS LAST YEAR?

Use this simple formula to
calculate the bottom-line costs:

My Average Tech Salary:

Number of Techs Who Quit Last Year:

Your Estimated Annual Cost of Burnout:
[Salary x 2 x Number of Quits]

PROVEN STRATEGIES TO PREVENT EMPLOYEE BURNOUT

STRATEGY 1:

OPTIMIZE SCHEDULING AND WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT

Smart scheduling stops burnout before it starts. Good routing software will cut drive time by 20%, which means less windshield time and workers who aren't exhausted from traffic. Your crews spend their energy on doing the production work instead of sitting in trucks, frustrated.

The key is mixing things up to prevent monotony. Let different workers tackle various property types and challenges occasionally. **Rotating tasks keeps the work interesting and helps workers develop new skills.**

Planning realistic daily schedules requires honest assessment of how long jobs actually take. Rather than cramming eight hours of work into six-hour windows based on wishful thinking, track actual job times and plan accordingly. **Build in a 15-20% buffer time for unexpected issues because equipment breaks down, customers change their minds and weather delays happen. One problem shouldn't wreck the entire day.**

STRATEGY 2:

INVEST IN PROPER EQUIPMENT AND TOOLS

When you factor in worker compensation claims and turnover, cheap tools cost more than expensive ones. The math is simple: anti-vibration gloves, lightweight trimmers, ergonomic shovels and padded knee protection save workers' bodies. **Spending that extra \$1,200 on a high-quality trimmer might prevent a \$12,000 insurance claim in the near future.** The upfront cost pays for itself in fewer injuries and longer-lasting employees.

Nothing burns out workers faster than equipment that quits mid-job. Preventive maintenance keeps tools running and prevents the frustration of wrestling with broken machinery on hot days. Good safety equipment protects workers and shows you care about their well-being. Invest in breathable work shirts, quality safety glasses, proper hearing protection and steel-toed boots that don't feel like concrete blocks.

Modern equipment upgrades make jobs easier and faster, reducing physical and mental strain. **Better equipment means workers can focus on doing quality work instead of fighting with tools that should have been retired years ago.**

STRATEGY 3:

CREATE CLEAR CAREER DEVELOPMENT PATHS

Workers stick around when they see a future beyond pushing mowers forever. Skills training shows investment in their future and often comes with pay increases. Send workers to equipment training, pesticide certification classes or landscape design courses. The knowledge they gain improves service quality while giving them reasons to stay. **A business that treats its employees well not only improves retention, but gains a positive reputation as a good place to work** – which also helps when it comes to recruiting the best talent.

Cross-training programs prevent boredom and create more valuable employees. Teach irrigation specialists about tree care. Train mowing crews on landscape installation. Versatile workers stay engaged and command higher wages. They also provide backup coverage when other team members are sick or on vacation.



The team at Good Nature places a strong focus on training and development and offering pathways to growth. The company started “Good Nature Winter University” to keep seasonal employees engaged during slower winter months, offering classes focusing on technical skills, personal development and leadership development. In addition, they provide every employee with a clear career path. Employees can visualize their future with:

- ✓ Organizational charts showing current and future opportunities
- ✓ Defined career paths with progression levels
- ✓ Recognition at each advancement stage (certificates, special gear)
- ✓ Real examples of employees who have advanced within the company

“We recognize not everyone will be in lawn care forever,
**BUT WE WANT TO HELP
THEM SUCCEED IN LIFE.**”

– Alex McClennan

Leadership development prepares your best workers for management roles instead of losing them to competitors. Leadership training, project management courses and customer service workshops build future supervisors from within. Tuition assistance for certifications helps ambitious workers advance their careers. Offer to pay for pesticide licenses, irrigation certifications or landscape architecture courses. The investment keeps good people and improves service quality.

STRATEGY 4:

IMPLEMENT FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Flexibility reduces stress and improves retention without costing much money. Flexible start times help workers avoid rush hour traffic and accommodate family needs. Some crews work better starting at 6 AM, while others prefer 8 AM starts. Job sharing for part-time options attracts workers who can't commit to full-time schedules. Two part-time workers might cost slightly more, but they're often more reliable than one overworked full-timer.

Seasonal employee programs acknowledge that some people prefer winter breaks. Offer guaranteed re-hire for good seasonal workers instead of forcing year-round commitments that burn people out. Remote work for administrative staff handling scheduling, billing and customer service lets them work from home when possible to improve work-life balance.

Shortly after taking over Lawn Cure, which handles 60,000 fertilizer applications annually in the greater Louisville area and Southern Indiana, President Patrick Hawkins made the somewhat controversial decision to move his technicians to a four-day work week, noting that even though the company offered very competitive compensation, turnover remained high. His skeptics were quickly proven wrong.



"When we made the decision, we had around 4,000-5,000 customers at best. Now we are well over 8,000 customers. I don't think we could ever go back to five days. I'd probably lose half my staff, they absolutely love it." Hawkins notes that the flexibility of this unconventional work schedule has not only led to company growth, but increased retention.

“**Turnover when we were running a five-day work week was between 30–35%. Now, I'd say 8–10% would be a high number.**”

– Patrick Hawkins



STRATEGY 5:

FOSTER STRONG TEAM COMMUNICATION

Poor communication breeds frustration and burnout faster than any other factor. Weekly 15-minute crew meetings keep everyone informed and heard. These sessions prevent minor problems from becoming big ones. Ask for input on scheduling, equipment needs and customer issues. Workers appreciate being consulted on decisions that affect their daily work.

An open-door policy for concerns means workers can bring up problems before they explode. Make it safe to report safety issues, customer complaints or equipment problems without fear of blame. Team-building activities don't have to be cheesy corporate retreats. Company barbecues, bowling nights or fishing tournaments build relationships and improve morale. **Teams that like each other work better together.**

Recognition programs for good work can be simple but effective. Employee of the month parking spots, gift cards for exceptional work or public praise in team meetings cost little but mean a lot. **Workers want to know their efforts are noticed and appreciated.**

Cleveland, OH-based Good Nature Organic Lawn Care maintains strong team communication through a multi-layered approach. What began as daily Zoom meetings during COVID evolved into weekly 15-minute company-wide virtual gatherings that have become essential to their culture. "It's the best thing we do," says owner Alec McLennan. During these meetings, team members discuss improvements, review metrics and recognize each other's achievements. Each employee also receives weekly one-on-one check-ins with their manager, ensuring no one falls through the cracks.

The company is open with team members about financial performance and strategic goals. Good Nature also conducts bi-annual culture surveys, carefully analyzing results to identify specific areas of improvement. This commitment to a healthy team culture has earned Good Nature recognition as one of Lawn & Landscape Magazine's [2024 Best Places to Work](#).



STRATEGY 6:

PRIORITIZE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLNESS

Healthy workers are productive workers who stick around longer. Heat-related illness prevention saves lives and prevents lawsuits. Mandate water breaks every hour during hot weather. Provide coolers, sports drinks and shaded rest areas. Train supervisors to recognize heat stroke symptoms and adjust schedules during extreme heat. Start earlier in summer to avoid peak temperatures.

Ergonomic training teaches workers how to lift properly, use tools correctly and recognize early signs of repetitive stress injuries. Prevention costs less than treatment. Mental health resources matter more than most owners realize. Employee assistance programs, stress management resources or **simply acknowledging that mental health is important can prevent burnout before it starts.**

STRATEGY 7:

OFFER COMPETITIVE COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

You get what you pay for, and cheap labor costs more in the long run. Annual pay reviews with merit increases reward good performance and prevent workers from job shopping, while performance bonuses and incentives reward exceptional work and efficiency improvements. Bonus programs for safety records, customer satisfaction scores or efficiency improvements motivate better performance.

Health insurance and retirement benefits attract better workers and improve retention. Even basic plans show workers you care about their long-term wellbeing. Paid time off that employees actually use prevents burnout. Encourage workers to take vacations. Unused vacation time often means overworked employees heading for burnout.



STRATEGY 8:

BUILD A POSITIVE COMPANY CULTURE

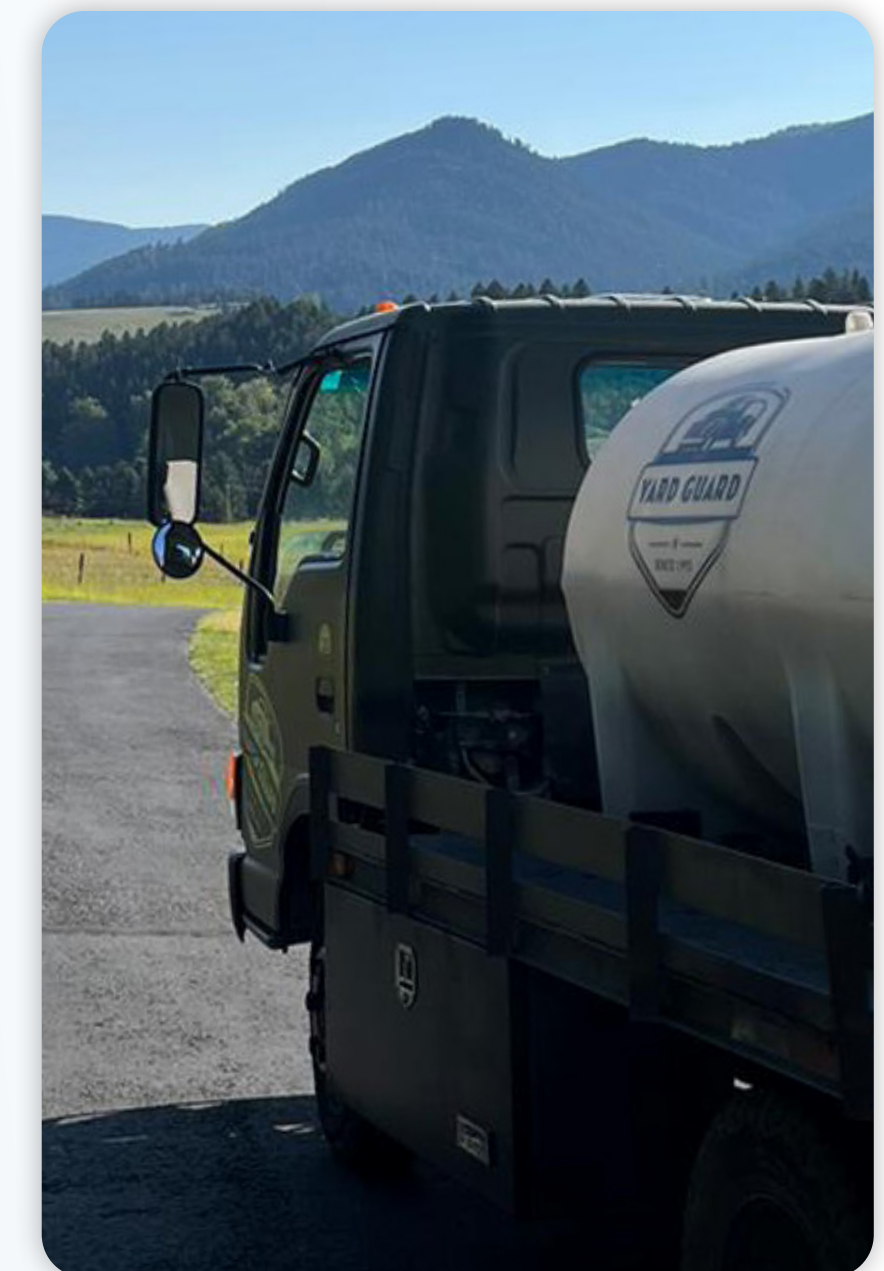
Culture determines whether workers dread coming to work or look forward to it. **Celebrate big contract wins, safety milestones, work anniversaries and personal achievements like certifications or graduations.** Annual company picnics, holiday parties or group outings to sporting events build relationships and improve morale.

Encourage work-life balance by respecting personal time. Don't call workers after hours unless it's truly urgent. Respect family commitments and personal time off. **Your attitude as an owner sets the tone for the entire company.** If you're stressed and negative, your workers will be too. Stay positive, treat people fairly and show that you care about their success.

Fast-growing Yard Guard, which currently boasts a staff of around 20 (including 12 technicians) and is headquartered in Bozeman, MT, works to motivate its team through incentivized programs and fun rewards for performance.



"We have a group chat," explains Office Manager Sidne Engstrom. "It's a way to thank your peers for doing little things and helping each other out." Yard Guard instituted a token system where team members can earn rewards for various things: presenting an interesting book or article to the team, getting a good review from a customer, making a sale out in the field, etc. Team members can also nominate each other for tokens. Tokens can then be exchanged for personal rewards like Yeti coolers or an extra vacation day, or an individual can use them to reward the whole team with a bowling outing or special lunch. Engstrom continues, "We always make burgers for the staff when they're coming back from their routes on Fridays. [With tokens] they could switch that to steak if they wanted to," says Engstrom. "You're building rapport on the team, and everyone's excited about that — and we're seeing retention due to some of these programs."



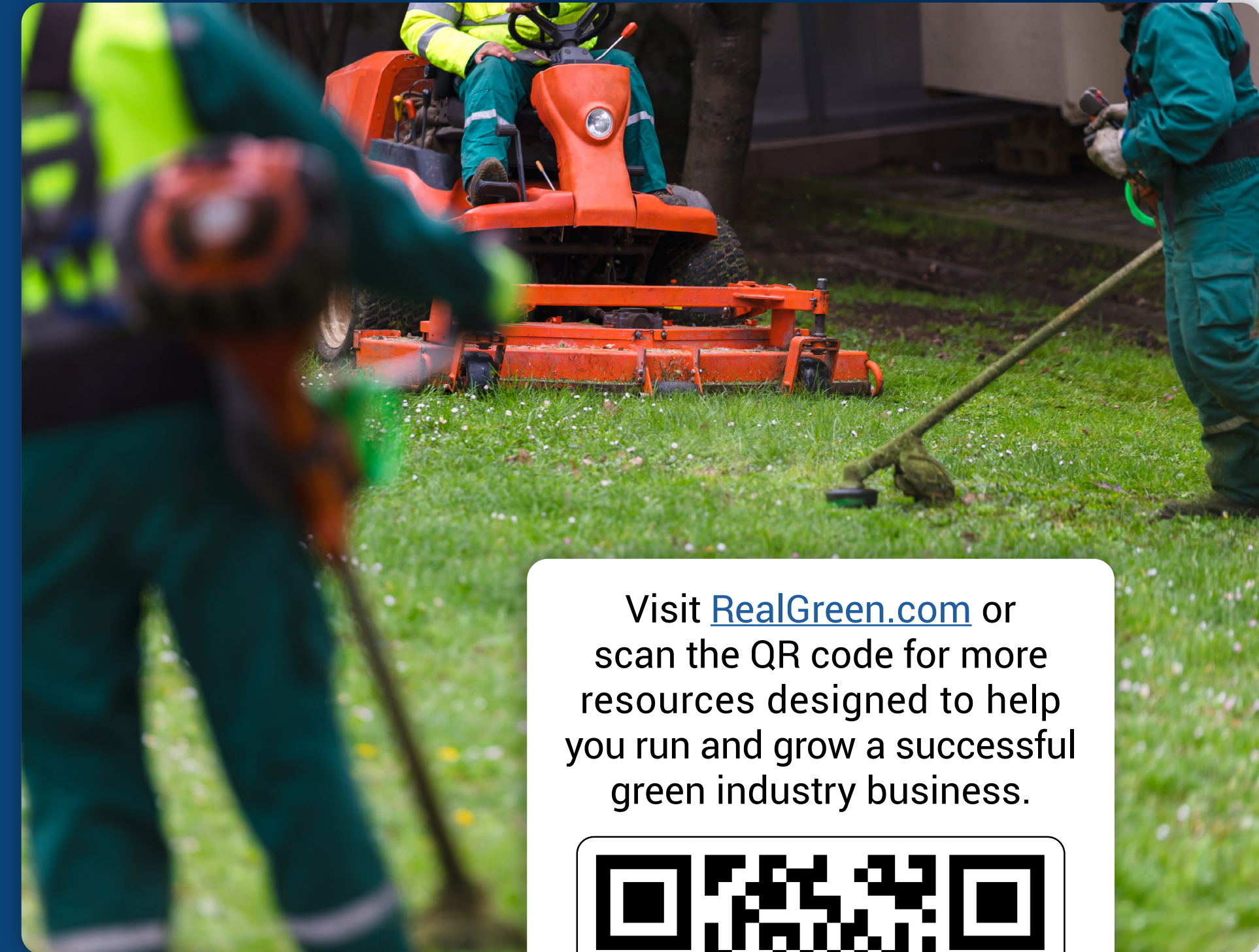
Companies that ignore burnout keep bleeding money through constant turnover, poor work quality and workers' compensation claims. The smart ones invest in prevention and watch their profit margins improve.

You don't need to implement all of these strategies at once. Pick two or three that address your most significant problems and start there. Maybe your scheduling is chaos and your equipment constantly breaks down. Focus on those areas first. **Success builds momentum.**

Consider also how technology can amplify your efforts. **Effective software solutions will automate the scheduling headaches that create burnout, streamline communication between crews and eliminate the manual processes that frustrate your staff and keep them working late.** When your systems work efficiently, your team will be happier.

The investment in preventing burnout pays dividends beyond just keeping workers around. Fulfilled employees do better work, which means fewer customer complaints and more referrals. They take fewer sick days and have fewer accidents. They suggest improvements instead of just collecting paychecks.

Your next star employee might already be working for you. Don't let burnout drive them away.



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