



Bringing the Boardroom to the Backyard:

SCORE helps a "landsculpting" business conquer the ins and outs of commerce

By Jacque Riley

Many parents may dream of leaving their office jobs to spend their days digging in the dirt with their kids. But Bill Kunze of Jungle Taming actually did it.

In 1996, after 32 years in the insurance industry, Kunze traded computers for clippers and started his own small business, Jungle Taming, a father-son enterprise built upon his son Jonathan's high school landscaping business. After Bill Kunze earned a 228-hour land management certification from Midlands Technical College, he and Jonathan began business saving rosebushes throughout Northeast Columbia and Forest Acres.

For seven years, Bill and Jonathan kept their landscaping business afloat by providing exceptional customer service, but Jungle Taming struggled in terms of planning and marketing. When Jonathan left the business temporarily to attend college, Bill knew that he needed to bring a boardroom mentality to his backyard business.

Bill contacted the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), a non-profit national organization that works with the Small Business Administration to provide free counseling to start-up and existing small businesses. In February 2003, SCORE paired Bill with counselor Walt Canfield, a former marketing executive.

Canfield describes Bill as strong in the face of initial discouragement from friends and family. Canfield himself, however, knew that Jungle Taming could evolve into a small business success story.

"For any entrepreneur with limited capital, sometimes the going gets rough--particularly when you run into unforeseen business problems," Bill says. "What you really need is a third party who believes in you and is willing to keep trying as long as you apply yourself."

During their first years in business, both Bill and Jonathan had noticed a landscaping need in the community falling between the two available extremes: basic lawn maintenance and the clear-cutting approach of most landscapers. In addition to assisting them with marketing initiatives, Canfield worked with them to streamline Jungle Taming's business plan to fill this niche, which Bill and Jonathan refer to as "landsculpting."

"On one side, you've got the 'mow, blow and go' guys who make money by quickly maintaining lots of yards," Bill explains. "On the other side are landscapers with large crews, heavy equipment and new plants.

"But in many cases, we can make a yard considerably more attractive by uncovering the beauty that's already there."

Armed with Canfield's insight, Jungle Taming honed its conservation-minded landscaping, which coaxes existing beauty from yards by removing excess growth so that previously dormant plants can thrive. Landsculpting is popular with gardeners because it requires an acute understanding of plants. Bill and Jonathan often work alongside their clients, teaching them how to care for neglected bushes and avoid common pitfalls. Jungle Taming re-inspects clients' yards at least once a year.

Because landscaping requires such a careful inspection of existing plants, Bill and Jonathan do most of their work down in the dirt with hand clippers. For the occasional problem plant, they use slender carpentry saws--a stark contrast to the power mowers and chainsaws of most landscape conglomerates.

Canfield continues to meet on a regular basis with Bill and Jonathan to help them refine their business tactics, reminding them to think like CEOs and take ownership for the direction of their company. In 2006, Jungle Taming experienced its busiest summer to date, with projects booked more than a month in advance. All three businessmen are confident that the landscaping concept has penetrated the Columbia market.

"Mr. Canfield has given us the confidence to take our business to the next level," Jonathan says. "We plan to help Columbia residents reclaim their yards for a very long time."

To learn more about Jungle Taming or to arrange a free landscaping assessment, visit www.jungletaming.com or call (803) 269-6339. To learn more about SCORE, visit www.scoremidlands.com or call (803) 765-5131.