

A Hammock in a Shady Place

by Robin Childers, CAE

By the time this newsletter plops into your mailbox or onto your desk, my role as MNLA's Executive Director will have come to a conclusion. As many of you are aware, I contract as the part-time association executive for several small professional and trade associations. I've worked with most of these groups, including MNLA, for nearly fifteen years and each has grown substantially. Like many of you in your businesses, I recently came to the crossroad where demand for my services exceeded my supply of time.

What to do? Increase the supply of my services by growing my business (hire employees, seek additional clients, improve and expand systems) or decrease the demand by downsizing (reducing the number of clients)?

For most of you reading this article (small business owners) and for me, these are challenging questions. I don't know that they were any easier to answer at the age of twenty-something than they are now at the age of forty-something, but my expectations have certainly changed. At twenty-something, I thought I would never run out of the energy needed to build my business and steer it toward success. Success starts to look different as we age however: more like a hammock in a shady place in the backyard and less like expensive gas-powered toys and exotic vacations.

To make a long story short, I chose the hammock, metaphorically speaking. I haven't retired by any means. I still have plenty of work to do. I still have to pay a mortgage. I continue to find enjoyment and feel passion for the work that I do, but I found that the possibility of having a little more time to develop new skills and new hobbies was more attractive than doing more of the same, only bigger.

For a number of pretty straightforward reasons, once I chose to downsize my business by reducing my number of clients, it was clear that I would need to resign as MNLA's association executive. First and foremost, my other two client organizations are related as they are both components of the same national organization. Eliminating one of those organizations wouldn't have much impact on my travel schedule and I would lose the advantage of some of the overlapping or similar activities of those clients. It just didn't make sense to reduce my number of clients any other way. When I explained my reasoning to then-MNLA President Andy Blanchford, he commented, "Well, that's pretty much a no-brainer."

Despite the easy logic of my decision, as well as the excitement I feel about having more time to pursue new endeavors, I also feel sadness and loss as I approach the end of my professional relationship with MNLA. We've done a lot of growing together in nearly fifteen years.

I console myself about this transition with a couple of thoughts. One is that the friendships I've established with individual MNLA members and leaders will still be there even though I no longer have a professional relationship with MNLA. And two is that the Association will be in very good hands as Lori Curtis assumes the leadership role as MNLA's new Executive Director. Not only is Lori well-equipped to pick up where I left off, but I also believe she brings new skills and experience that will expedite some positive changes for the Association.

I wish all of you continued success in Montana's nursery and landscape industry. Don't forget that *you* get to decide what that success looks like. It just might be a hammock in a shady place in the backyard.

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