

Like a Boss: Honesty First – Even at the Worst



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Steve Despain, founder of [Earthwise Landscape & Pest Control Services](#) in Atascadero, Calif., says some of the biggest challenges he's faced in his 20-plus years of business have been related to tricky pests that make the job anything but ordinary. But he says that "honesty and integrity" have been on his side in keeping clients happy despite their pest problem.

In his years in the pest business, Despain has seen it all – pests hiding in the sneakiest of places. Despain jokes that it doesn't feel too good being initially outsmarted by an ant. In cases where Despain hasn't been able to find the source of the ants – there's no trace of them leading to the exterior, but they're all over the house – it sometimes turns out that they're actually under the foundation. In these cases, the course action may require tearing up part of the carpet and drilling into the foundation. These kinds of cases can be challenging with the customer but it's made much easier when honesty is the main approach.

"When facing a particularly challenging case, the best thing you can do is just be honest," Despain says. "Tell the client it's going to be a challenge and explain why."

With rodents and pests, clients tend to expect a quick and inexpensive fix. But downplaying a difficult situation only comes back to bite you in the end. Despain says he's honest from the get-go, even if it might lose him a job – and it has.

"I had one commercial account that ended up calling someone else because they wanted their rat problem resolved quicker," Despain says. "Three months later they called me back because they saw the value in my approach."

Like anything in life, the quickest solution isn't always the most effective one and Despain doesn't sugarcoat the situation for his clients just because

it might help him make a sale.

“I’ve been in this business too long to play those games,” Despain says. “The majority of the time if you give customers the real situation and are honest with them, they’ll be able to see you have their best interest at heart and will be on board.”

Despain adds that it’s also important to formulate an agreement with the client in terms of what they must follow-through with on their end.

“Pest control does often require you to work together – you can only do so much,” Despain says. “If they have to make a structural repair or another change, it’s important that they are clear on what responsibility falls on them. That can be tricky too but is another reason why clear communication and honesty is so important from start to finish.”

Our [Like a Boss](#) series highlights some common business challenges landscape professionals face and how they conquer them.