

What's the Landscape Industry Like After College?



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One of the most difficult aspects of transitioning from school to the real world is having realistic expectations.

It's understandably not that easy to know what the job market will be like when, as a student, you haven't been part of it. You've worked hard in school, and now you're eager for a job.

But what can students really expect in terms of getting hired? Is it even possible to get hired right into a management role or should students expect to work in the field for a while? What can students do to improve your chances of landing that first job?

Here are some of the real-life questions students are asking. Landscape professionals know that you're looking for practical advice and honest answers. This panel of five green industry professionals answer some of the most pressing questions on what to expect as students enter the job force.



Student question: What will my first job be at a landscape company once I leave school?

Tina Czysz: Most college graduates will begin their careers in the field. Some will participate in an internship or mentorship program that will rotate through different facets of the organization. This allows them exposure to the industry as a whole. Once they begin their actual career path, they will start in the field to learn the larger scope of the work.

Fred Oskanian: If you've never set foot in the field, I absolutely want you to get some experience even if you're headed for a management position. How can you ask someone else to do something in a certain way if you haven't done

it yourself? You won't have realistic expectations.

Student question: Does everyone start out in the field?

Jon Zalewski: You should absolutely expect to get some field experience. If you don't have a realistic grasp on what it's like working in the field, it's going to be difficult for you to assign that work to others.

Fred Oskanian: There is honestly a lot of opportunity to learn about your team when you work in the field. You learn about the people who you will be managing when you work alongside them. That's invaluable knowledge.

Student question: What can I expect my growth path to be like?

Tina Czysz: Typically, you would begin in the field training on a crew. From there, you can elevate to a foreman and then a project/field/ operations manager. Next, a production/branch manager. Once you have gained working knowledge of the facets of the operation, you can gear up for a higher position such as director of operations or vice president of operations. If your path is sales, you will begin as a measurer then associate client relations manager and then elevate from there to associate business development coordinator, client relations manager or business developer.

Student question: How can I position myself to grow in a landscape company?

Fred Oskanian: Over the course of time, show that you're a reliable person. Show that you follow the company's protocol and that you have the company's best interests at heart. Small details matter here – not letting trucks idle when you're not moving in order to save gas or being a good role model by telling someone to stop littering at a job site. Treat the company like you're the owner.

Jon Zalewski: If you start working in the field and go out there with a good work ethic and a positive attitude, you can move up pretty quickly in this industry. The key is to prove yourself. Be on time, be efficient and work hard. Show the boss that you care about the company, and you will get noticed for it.

Tina Czysz: Once you enter the industry, stay passionate about the work and the results; understand it is a service industry. Be open and eager to continue to learn all facets of the industry.

Student question: What can I do to set myself apart from the crowd?

Fred Oskanian: Get accredited as a certified arborist or horticulturist. Anything that a company can advertise to their customers that makes their company more valuable makes you more valuable. Accreditations and licenses are a great way to stand out. A company can market your skills and charge a little bit more for your services, which is very desirable.

Student question: What's a piece of parting advice you'd offer to someone about to enter the real world?

Nikos Phelps: If you don't enjoy it, don't do it. So many people stay doing something they don't enjoy. You spend too much time at work in your life to not be doing something you love. If you don't love where you work, change your job.

Fred Oskanian: Be realistic in your expectations. This is a service business. You won't be making as much as your friends who are graduating with a degree in finance. But that's probably not why you got into this field. You should do something because you love doing it. If you don't love it, you probably got into the wrong field.

Tina Czysz: Growth doesn't happen overnight; you won't get into a management position as soon as you graduate. It takes hands-on work in the field and a broad understanding of many facets of the industry to manage it.