

3 Stress Strategies For Snow Pros



Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

Snow and ice management can be dangerous work, and that means it's stressful work as well.

The job involves working long hours in intense conditions – and that alone can easily take a toll.



But the snow contractors *PLOW* spoke to say it's so much more than just the long hours and the harsh weather. Many say it can feel like a thankless job when you're on the road in the middle of the night and not interacting with people.

Still, there are ways to keep the stress to a minimum. The snow businesses that are most invested in their employees go out of their way to implement strategies that will make the job easier.

"I don't think the average person realizes how stressful this job is," says Joe Flake, owner of [Target Lawn Care](#) in Paola, Kansas. "But it can be incredibly exhausting."

Flake says that some of the most stressful scenarios he's faced have been any time a truck has gone down in the middle of the night. Having been through that in the past, Flake says he goes out of his way to make sure all the equipment is in good shape before it goes out the door, and he always makes sure spare parts are handy. While you can't foresee or prevent every possible incident, Flake says that preparedness is the biggest key to reducing stress.

And that's what so many of the snow contractors we spoke with echoed. The more prepared you can be, the more peace of mind you'll have. Steven Cohen, chief innovation officer for [GreenMark Consulting Group](#), says snow contractors should never wait for problems to become an issue. Instead, being proactive can make all the difference. Make an effort to write down your

processes for all snow operation tasks in advance, which gives you something to work from.



Create a plan: Make an effort to write down processes for all snow operation tasks to give the crew a baseline to work from. Photo: Boreal Property Management

"I continually see lack of planning as the No. 1 cause of stress for snow contractors," Cohen says. "Many smaller snow plowing companies think they can often operate without official, written processes in place. But systems and processes for a snow business are imperative at all sizes of the business cycle. I suggest that if you want to have some form of sanity during the winter, you must have effective systems and plans regardless of your company size."

Stress strategy No. 1: Cutting back

Some snow and ice professionals say they have become more selective about the snow work they do in order to maintain their sanity. Trying to tackle too many snow jobs is simply not possible to maintain.

Andrew Morse, who manages the snow end of [Belknap Landscape Co. Inc.](#)'s Gilford, New Hampshire-based business, says that making the decision to solely focus on commercial work and doing away with plowing residential driveways has gone a long way in reducing stress. He says the company narrowed it down to what they're most efficient at, which was commercial work.



Photo: iStock

"With the number of people we have and the amount of equipment we have, we're much better suited to just taking on commercial jobs," Morse says. "With residential work, everyone wants their driveway done by 6 a.m., and it was requiring crews to break away from those big commercial sites to go help with driveways. It just wasn't feasible."

Brian Labrie, owner of [B.H. Landscape Co.](#), in Merrimack, New Hampshire, says that "driveways are simply too far apart to keep everyone happy." He found they were both very demanding and very low revenue. As a result, Labrie says the only residential driveway he'll now plow is his own – at the very end of the storm. Besides the occasional emergency he's helped with, Labrie says he's eliminated residential plowing and that's helped him stay sane.

"It was just too much running around," he says. "Sometimes it's a wiser business move to turn jobs away."



Working in shifts ensures your crew can respond to emergencies or tidy up loose ends in the waning hours of a storm when many operations are crashing from fatigue. Photo: Belknap Landscape Co. Inc.

Stress strategy No. 2: Utilizing shift work

Jason Hollway, snow manager, [Mountain View Landscapes and Lawncare Inc.](#), in Chicopee, Massachusetts, says there was a time when he was just starting out in the snow business that he would try to pull a 40-hour shift and run a whole storm from start to finish. Today, Hollway says he's learned that you can run a storm smarter by getting the work done in shifts. He says this also ensures that someone is always available – 24/7 – even in the final legs of the storm when it comes down to a few small things that need to be buttoned up.



“Back then, you’d try to reach us after 40 hours, and we’d all be in bed,” Hollway says. “We’ve realized we can offer better customer service by running 12-hour shifts. Crews will get an eight-hour break and come back and be ready to go again.”

Flake also runs shift work and says he calls it “the hot seat,” which ensures the plow is always running. Someone is always in the hot seat, but who it is may change.

“Keeping the truck moving ensures it’s still making money but we know how important it is to give our crews a break,” Flake says. “While I know there are still companies out there that run their crews much longer, we find that around the 12- to 14-hour mark is where the quality of work declines. That’s when we give our guys a break to go rest and someone else takes over.”

It’s important that management runs on shifts just like crews do so there’s always someone available for support, as well. John Paige, general manager/managing partner, [Boreal Property Management](#) in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, says they have dedicated managers that oversee the snow accounts and they’re constantly rotating, just as the snow crews do.

“Part of their job is supporting the crews, so they’ll go out with coffee and water just to keep the guys motivated and going,” Paige says. “This is an industry that can really take a toll and wear you out, so half the battle is just keeping everyone motivated. That is an important part of the managers’ duties.”

Read more: [Like a Boss: Smarter Snow Management with Shift Work](#)



Photo: iStock

Stress strategy No. 3: Staying sane

At the end of the day, what makes the snow business so stressful is the lack of control. While you’ll never be able to control the weather, you must focus on the things that you can impact, such as processes and systems. The better prepared you are for an event, the less stressful it will be.

Cohen offers these words of advice to snow management businesses: Do your

best to stay calm – even when the going gets tough.

“One thing I’ve learned is that Mother Nature is responsible for sending us the snow, and we are only responsible for removing it,” he says. “As they say, you must plan for the worst and hope for the best.”