

# Expectations and Spongebob Squarepants



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There is a “Spongebob Squarepants” episode where Spongebob and his friend, Patrick, are bored so they sneak into Old Man Squidward’s shed. When Squidward finds them in his shed, they ask him if they can play with his lawn mower.

At first he tells them no, but then he has a thought: Maybe if he lets them “play” with the lawn mower he will get them to mow his lawn and he can sit back and relax. So he tells them to go ahead! But, of course, when Spongebob and Patrick get ahold of the mower they make a complete mess of Squidward’s lawn and take off across town wreaking havoc with their new plaything. Squidward is left standing there dumbfounded.

When I first saw this episode, I thought it was hilarious. (If you want to check it out it’s called “The Curse of Bikini Bottom,” and the scene takes place in the first few minutes of the show.) I thought it was funny because it made me think about my company and the expectations I have for my employees versus the actual outcome.

You see, Squidward expected that Spongebob and Patrick would know how to use the lawn mower and do a good job mowing his lawn. As Squidward discovered, it didn’t turn out that way. In his mind, he saw himself relaxing with a cold drink while Spongebob and Patrick went about mowing his lawn for him. He expected one thing and got something totally different. The problem is that he didn’t tell the two goofballs what he expected. He just assumed they would know exactly what he wanted them to do.

I think as business owners we are guilty of that from time to time. We expect our employees to understand our thought processes and execute tasks exactly as we see them in our minds. Of course this is flawed and does not really work.

So, what should Squidward have done prior to letting Spongebob and Patrick go crazy with his lawn mower? He should have set the expectations, of course!

The Spongebob example is just a cartoon and meant to be funny in a ridiculous way. So, why spoil a great episode by having Squidward do some training with poor Spongebob and Patrick, as if he didn't already know they weren't the brightest bulbs in the batch?

Had he been a responsible landscape business owner, he would have had them read the safety manual for the mower first, then have them watch a training video. He would have set up a training area in his backyard where they could learn to use the lawn mower. Finally, after they understood how to safely and properly run the mower, he would have taught them about making straight lines and mowing around obstacles. Only then would he have expected the outcome he wanted: a prim, nicely cut lawn.

We have to train our employees, set the expectations and give them the tools they need so they can succeed. We can't assume that just because we know how to do something they are going to know how to do it, too.

On the other hand, just in case they show up at your office looking to fill out an application, I wouldn't hire either Spongebob or Patrick. They wreak havoc with a lawn mower.