

Helping to Create Reasonable Expectations Towards Snow Removal Services



Meeting expectations means setting the right expectations in order to “hit the mark” every time

Education is an imperative part of all of our jobs, as is creating the right expectations of our clients, and of our teams. So what better way to serve as a resource than to educate those to whom we are responsible to on the topics of what is reasonable to expect, why certain items are a greater challenge than others, and how landscape and snow removal contractors are structured / operate to help create a more harmonized view of how to achieve mutual success.

Like all companies, Landscape and Snow Removal Contractors are predicated on

making the most efficient use of their resources, and achieving the greatest amount of productivity. This means making sure employees and equipment are actively working vs. not. In industries where labor is already a problem (unfortunately those willing to work hard at manual labor jobs are a scarce commodity), employees need to be kept continually busy, aka maximizing productivity. Having too many employees, or not enough work, means low productivity, and less profit. Too few employees and the work can't all be done in a timely manner. And with the pay scale for landscape / snow removal employees already on the low side, employees who are not getting enough hours to make ends meet, will quickly look for employment elsewhere. Unlike our beloved Denver Broncos, where such a high value is placed on players by fans and viewers, service companies can't pay employees high salaries for them to “sit on the sidelines” in case they are needed. Doing so, and paying employees to be available only when a job is needed, would mean higher costs to the contractor, which would then be transferred on to the customer. In order to control those costs and offer pricing that is more affordable, it is imperative to be as efficient / productive with our labor as possible.

One of the greatest opportunities for expectations to be misaligned between Client and contractor are in regards to snow removal services. Snow events are the ultimate in volatility. The best defense for this uncertainty is a well-constructed preparation and response plan when snow conditions dictate the need for service.

Snow removal companies have to plan based on what they can get done in a timely, efficient manner based on average or “typical” accumulations / conditions. Again, they need to be supremely efficient, and allocate staff and time for completing work based on what is most likely to happen; most often between 2-8” of accumulation. Similar to the efficiency goals for landscape, productivity goals for snow removal involve maintaining the balance between too much and not enough resources, and completing work in a reasonable amount of time.

Employees paid on an hourly basis need to maximize the amount of time they work during each snow event. Having too many employees means that during a snow event of 2”, those employees will get very few hours. With multiple occurrences of this scenario, the employees will look for other employment. One might think the solution is to simply give them more jobs.

However, this approach would compromise the timeliness of service, leaving customers unhappy, and potentially introducing great risk and liability

The primary disconnect for snow removal, often involves the expectation, that a 4-6” snow event will be serviced following the same timeline as a 20” blizzard. What this means then, is for larger storms like we had this past year, contractors are trying to get more done with the same resources as what they have allocated / available to service properties when there is 8” of snow. It simply isn’t possible to meet the same timelines, just as it isn’t possible to “manufacture” more employees and more equipment. And going back to the football analogy, it is difficult to keep “backups”, as employees who aren’t getting called to plow or shovel snow right away and are watching their counterparts tally more hours and more money, will simply go elsewhere where they can get the hours they need / want to make the money they need / want.

Consider also, the contractual obligations involved, and the protection against liability, which create yet another opportunity for expectations to be misaligned. The responsibility falls upon the contractor to manage snow services so as to mitigate liability, while also controlling costs. Typically the 2 are conversely related; in order to reduce potential liability, more services are needed equating to a higher cost. Mistakes and problems most often happen when Clients place too much priority on cost savings, and compromise their protection against liability. This is often why a contractor will refer back to their contract. While wanting to maintain their relationship, they will follow the contract (if at odds with the desires / direction of the Client) to protect the contractor from liability.



The difference between getting what is expected and what is served, often means understanding what is on the menu

The goal in providing this information is to facilitate a greater understanding and appreciate of the abilities and limitations of snow removal contractors. Once this understanding is achieved, there is a greater opportunity to partner together to develop and execute a game plan that meets the mutual goals of the client and contractor.