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Dual Chapter Installation January 25, 2024

- **Yolanda's Mexican Restaurant, Simi Valley**
- **See page 2 for details**



California Landscape Contractors Association
San Fernando Valley Chapter
c/o El Dorado Communications
18466 Dragoneira Drive
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HOLIDAY PARTY VIPS – The SFV & CI Dual Chapter Holiday Party and White Elephant Gift Exchange, held in early December, took place in Somis at the lovely home of Kim Lucas (shown here with SFV President Francisco Salazar). The event was well attended and ushered in the Holiday Season with great camaraderie and fun. (See page 7 for more Holiday Party photos.)

San Fernando Valley & Channel Islands
Chapters of CLCA Invite You to:

2024

Board

Installation

Dinner



California
Landscape
Contractors
Association

WHEN:: Thurs., January 25, 2024 at 6 p.m.

WHERE:: Yolanda's Mexican Café
590 E. Los Angeles Ave., Simi Valley, CA

COST:: \$40 per person *buffet-style dinner*

RSVP:: Francisco at (818) 970-7592

This will be a great networking event where you'll have the opportunity to connect with CLCA professionals from both regions.



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STATE AND LOCAL EVENTS

Don't miss any of these very important events!

Subject to Change – Check with Chapter Office First

- Jan 16-17 Leadership Conference, San Marcos.
- 25 Installation Dinner at Yolanda's Café in Simi Valley with Channel Islands Chapter. Buffet dinner for \$40 per person. State President Tom Sweeney to install new boards.
- Feb 1 Board Meeting via Zoom 9 a.m.
- April Meet and Greet social event. Date & Location TBD
- May 2 CI event: Landscape Photograph Basics – How to Take the Best Pictures of Your Landscapes. The event will be held at Ventura Coast Brewing Company, 76 S Oak St, Ventura, CA 93001. TBD
- June 22 Beautification Awards Banquet. Location TBD.
- Sept 13 Channel Islands Chapter and Friends Fishing Trip through Hook's Sportfishing, 3600 Harbor Blvd. #115, Oxnard, CA 93035.
- November CI event: Landscape Lighting Demonstration by SPJ Lighting at Devil Mountain Wholesale Nursery, 3200 W Telegraph Rd, Fillmore, CA 93015. Details TBD.
- November CLCA Convention Newport Beach TBD

Nor Cal Landscape & Nursery Show February 8 in San Mateo

The welcome of early rainfall is hopefully a herald of a brighter future for the golden state. This February it's time to sharpen your skills, update your professional licenses, check out some new equipment and see what new varieties of plant material are coming onto the market.

Here's your chance for one action-packed day on Thursday, February 8, 2024. Set your sights on the Nor Cal Landscape & Nursery Show at the San Mateo Event Center. Bring your staff!

This year's show features a dozen seminars offering 24 CEUs, 180-plus exhibitors, and free admission if you pre-register.

For more information contact Margo Cheuvront: Email: margoc@frontiernet.net; Phone: 530-458-3190.

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FRANCISCO SALAZAR
SFV Chapter
President
Groundcare
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New Year, New Opportunities

Hello fellow San Fernando Valley CLCA members. It is a new year and with it comes new opportunities. Like other years, CLCA is preparing for several events throughout the year with our biggest event being our Beautification Awards Program.

I recommend you do not miss the opportunity for an award. Although it sounds like a long time from now, start looking at your sites to figure which might be award worthy and begin preparing those sites for judging in May, and

the Awards Banquet June 22. If you have any questions regarding the process, please feel free to contact us and we would be happy to help.

Here are additional activities scheduled for SFV this year. I hope to see you at our Dual Chapter Installation of the SFV and Channel Island boards on Thursday, January 25 at Yolanda's Mexican Restaurant in Simi Valley. We'll get started at 6:00 p.m. with a buffet dinner. The event is \$40 per person. State President Tom Sweeney will be the Installing Officer.

Next will be a Poker Night on March 19 hosted by the CI Chapter at Carpinteria Veterans Memorial Building, 941 Walnut Ave, Carpinteria, CA 93013. All area chapters are invited, and we can look forward to an evening of fun, food and poker skill. Details are still being worked out.

SFV will be hosting a Meet and Greet social event in April, as well as participating in educational events throughout the year. The first one is Landscape Photograph Basics – How to Take the Best Pictures of Your Landscapes, organized by the CI Chapter. The event will be held May 2 at Ventura Coast Brewing Company, 76 S Oak St, Ventura, CA 93001. Details TBD

We will also be participating in the Channel Islands & Friends Fishing Trip on September 13. There will be additional events we will undertake, plus we will also be promoting attendance at CLCA State events including the Convention in Newport Beach in November.

As always if you would like to be more active in the chapter events, please feel free to reach out to us. Thank you and have a great year!
– Francisco

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Quartz Hill Garden Center - (661) 943-5222 • 42254 50th St. West

Our Dear Friend Charles Nunley Needs Your Help

• GoFundMe Fundraising Effort Started for Long-Time CLCA Member

CLCA Ambassador, Past State President, and former LA Chapter President Charles Nunley needs your help now. He suffered a heart attack and stroke late last year, has been bedridden for months, and is now in hospice care in Costa Mesa. A group of Charles' CLCA friends, along with his sisters and brother, have come together to help Charles with his medical care and day-to-day expenses. A landscape contractor for over 40 years, Charles was told he would never work again.

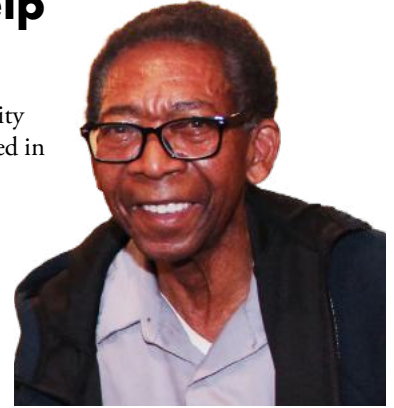
A GoFundMe page has been established in Charles' name to get him the care and support he needs and deserves. **You can reach Charles' GoFundMe page by visiting <https://bit.ly/SirCharlesFundraiser> or by clicking on the QR code here:**



Here are some of the highlights of the life of Sir Charles Nunley... Charles Nunley has been a landscape contractor, having worked in the trade and in his own business in Southern California for over 40 years. Charles is a Life Member of CLCA (California Landscape Contractors Association) and has served as the Los Angeles Chapter President in 1979 and CLCA State President in 1998. Born in Los Angeles in October 1939, Charles is 84 years old. He was raised in

the South-Central part of the city and until the heart attack resided in the San Gabriel Valley.

Charles has been a CLCA member since the seventies and has been an active member since the day he joined. In addition to State and local presidencies he has served in many other capacities including Certification Chairman, as well as having been named a Knight of the Garter and an Allegiance Award winner.



There are few if any CLCA chapters Charles has not visited and helped, often volunteering for various local events and committees. Charles Nunley is a Green Industry Hall of Fame Co-Founder as well as a recipient. He also has volunteered for years at a local food bank, helping pass out food to the homeless. Now it's our turn to give back to Charles in his time of need. Please help with any donation you can afford. From everyone who loves Charles Nunley, thank you and God Bless.

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Product Pricing Strategies That Take the Guesswork Out of Pricing

From an article by Brett Farmiloe

Simplify your pricing system

"One pricing mistake I made in one of my other companies was having too many price points. We were a service-based business, and pricing varied based on event type, location, and group size, for example.

"We soon found that it took up a significant amount of our sales team's time to explain the differences in pricing and the reasoning behind the nuances. To improve the experience for both our customers and our staff, we launched a tiered pricing system with three simple pricing types rather than dozens of individually priced products. This approach attracted and converted more customers and cut down on conversation time between sales reps and clients."

—Michael Alexis, *swag.org*

Avoid charging too little

"During the early days of my previous startup, I made the mistake of charging too little for my product. It was too good of a deal, and many people took advantage of it. I found myself overworked and not making much profit. I eventually realized that I needed to raise my prices to a more reasonable rate, and it took a few years, but I eventually got to where my business was very successful."

—Matthew Ramirez, *Paraphrase Tool*

Limit frequent discounts

"You want discounts to entice a customer to make a purchase within a specific time period. If you offer discounts too often, customers will know to hold off and wait for another promotion that will come up soon, and this reduces the sense of urgency to purchase and get a good deal. This can end up making your sales cycle longer and can cause issues with revenue and cash flow."

—Jenna Nye, *On The Strip*

Beware of unlimited offers

"If you offer unlimited anything, people can and will take advantage of it, particularly if it's a service. Unless you've done an in-depth analysis and priced your service appropriately, offering unlimited access to something can sink a company, particularly when you're trying to grow it."

—Beverly Gearreald, *Transizion*

Don't underestimate the costs

"As a small business owner, one pricing mistake I made early on was underestimating the true cost of a job and not factoring in all the expenses involved. I made the mistake of pricing my services too low to be competitive and attract more customers. However, I soon realized that this pricing strategy was unsustainable and was hurting my profits in the long run.

Continued on page 12

CNGA G.R.A.S.S. Research Awards Application Deadline is January 31

The California Native Grassland Association (CNGA) is still accepting applications for the California Grassland Research Awards for Student Scholarship (GRASS). CNGA offers competitive research funds to promote undergraduate and graduate student research focused on understanding, preserving, and restoring California's native grassland ecosystems in accordance with the CNGA Mission and Goals.

Eligibility: Students from any accredited college or university doing research within California may apply for a CNGA student research scholarship (home institution may be outside California).

Awards: CNGA funds at least four, \$500 awards per year. These awards are designed to support basic undergraduate and graduate research in native grassland ecosystems. Funds can be used to support fieldwork, small equipment purchases, visits to herbaria, materials and/or books. Students may re-apply and receive a scholarship award for a maximum of two years.

NEW! John Anderson Memorial Scholarship: This year, there is a new opportunity for a one-time bonus award of \$500 in honor of CNGA Founding Member John Anderson. If the review commit-

tee feels there is an applicant who is doing work on a topic that was close to John's heart, we will award an additional one-time scholarship at the committee's discretion. Topics John was passionate about include, but are not limited to, seed-based restoration, native seed production, tarweeds, and weed control.

To apply, send an application that includes: Title of the project Your name, contact information, and mailing address Project supervisor/major professor and institution Project summary, including the location, objectives and significance (1

page or less, 12 pt. font) Proposed methods Expected accomplishments Timeline for project completion Budget and justification for scholarship funds Applications should be no longer than 3 pages (PDF format is preferred).

Please email all materials (with "CNGA GRASS Grants" in subject line) to grants@cnga.org by **January 31**.

For more information about the California Native Grassland Association, please visit our website at cnga.org.

Notification of the award recipient will occur via email by March 15. Grant funds must be utilized within 12 months of the award.



SFV & CI Chapters Enjoy Holidays Together



HOLIDAY MERRYMAKERS – Attendees from both San Fernando Valley and Channel Islands Chapters – plus friends and family – whoop it up at the December dual chapter celebration and white elephant gift exchange. The event also featured delicious potluck dishes and lots of laughs.



PAST PRESIDENT of both State and the Channel Islands Chapter, Pete Dufau, thanks Tom Lucas of Performance Nursery for securing the event location.



LONG-TIME FRIENDS – The Petersons, Donna and Gary, enjoy celebrating the Holidays with their good friends Cindy and Mickey Straus. Cindy is Auxiliary President; Mickey is Past State and SFV President.



CI BOARD CHAIR Kyle Hillendahl (right) and past CI Board member Claudio Sandoval Jr. enjoy the Holiday bash. Kyle helped organize the potluck for the event.



RENEWING FRIENDSHIPS at the Holiday Celebration are Leslie Colvin and Wendy Lopez of El Dorado Communications. Camaraderie is a big benefit of CLCA events.



FIRST FAMILY CELEBRATION – SFV President Francisco Salazar, wife Yuri and daughter Vicky (all standing), enjoy white elephant antics with Yuri's grandmother Victoriana, and Yuri's mother Blanca.



DOUBLE WINNERS – CLIC President Gary Peterson and wife Donna show off a gold hunting knife and car vac they won as prizes.



STRAUSS PRIZE - Mickey and Cindy Straus display the white elephant gift exchange they won. Mickey, as SFV Treasurer, do you have to report that? Just kidding.



LET THERE BE LIGHT – CI Past President Kyle Hillendahl thanks Jeff Lawrence of Western Global for leaving his truck lights on to help attendees locate the Lucas home set back from a dark street.



TWIN WIN – Pete Dufau shows off his white elephant prize – two bottles of Carolinas Irish Cream. Double the smiles.



HYDRATION ACTION – Claudio Sandoval Jr. holds up the new travel mug he won at the SFV/CI Dual Chapter Holiday Party and White Elephant Gift Exchange. Lots of great gifts, lots of great FUN!



JOSÉ ROBLES
Owner
Landscape Warehouse

Get Ready, the Robots are Coming!

It is sometimes said that – other than death and taxes – *the only constant is change*. Change is inevitable. It is human nature to resist change, primarily because of its threat to the status quo – which is known and at least tolerated. There is even more resistance because of fear of the unknown which change brings.

Unfortunately, fighting change is an unwinnable battle, and eventually most businesses accept it or face the danger of the world – and their customers – passing them by.

Today, the areas of life most susceptible to change are those connected in any way to technology, like the Green Industry, for example. Thankfully, those of us involved in landscaping and related fields are very familiar with change – and have learned to adapt to it – since the industry is organized in part around the four changing seasons.

Although we are a flexible bunch, it doesn't mean that we happily accept every change that comes down the pike – especially MANDATED CHANGE. From calls to “ban the blower” to increasingly restrictive irrigation laws, we'll reluctantly accept *sensible proposed mandated changes* and continue to resist – through

CLCA's lobbying efforts and other means – changes that threaten the viability of our industry, or any part of it.

Every change brings with it winners and losers. Those businesses that quickly took advantage of the CORE program that paid a percentage of the cost of battery-operated landscape equipment are winners. Those who were reluctant to enroll or too late to enroll are kicking themselves as they saw CORE's funds dry up. If this is you or your company, don't miss out on the next big landscape equipment opportunity. Which leads me to my comment about the robots...

I recently met with individuals from Husqvarna who were here from Europe to discuss their robotic battery-operated lawnmower that is gaining popularity in several European countries. GPS guided, this lawnmowing wonder maps out the landscape and proceeds to finely cut it on its own – no basket and no operator! Similar technology is being used on athletic fields here in the U.S., but not at this scale and detail.

The potential cost savings using this technology are significant. You can already see the writing on the wall. If those robots are working well in Europe, it's just a matter of time before they'll be working here. Get ahead of this coming change. I will keep you posted. Like I said, Get Ready, the Robots are Coming! – José

Today, the areas of life most susceptible to change are those connected in any way to technology, like the Green Industry, for example.

Minimum Wage Laws Update

The Labor Commissioner's Office is reminding employers that the state minimum wage increased to \$16 on January 1, 2024. Some cities and counties in California have a local minimum wage that is higher than the state rate.

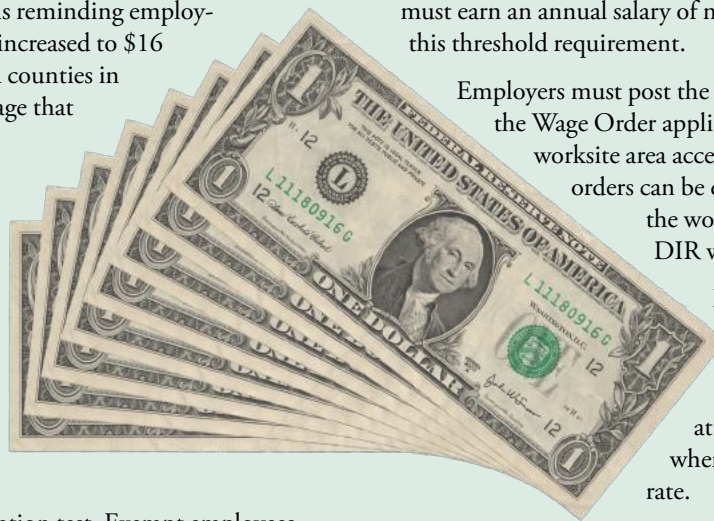
State law requires that most California workers be paid the minimum wage. Workers paid less than the minimum wage are urged to contact the Labor Commissioner's Office in their area to file a wage claim.

The change in the minimum wage also affects the minimum salary an employee must earn to meet one part of the overtime exemption test. Exempt employees are not subject to the payment of overtime for hours worked. An employee must earn no less than two times the state's minimum wage for full-time work to meet this initial requirement of the exemption test. As of January 1, 2024, employees in California

must earn an annual salary of no less than \$66,560 to meet this threshold requirement.

Employers must post the Minimum Wage Order and the Wage Order applicable to their workplace at a worksite area accessible to employees. The wage orders can be downloaded and printed from the workplace postings page on the DIR website.

Employers must ensure that the wage rate is displayed on the employee's pay stub, and that employees are paid at least the minimum wage even when employees are paid at piece rate.



The California Department of Industrial Relations, established in 1927, protects and improves the health, safety, and economic well-being of over 18 million wage earners, and helps their employers comply with state labor laws. DIR is housed within the Labor & Workforce Development Agency.

Business Takeaways Learned in 2023 From an article by Nellie Akalp Founder and CEO of CorpNet.com

I've never been one to dwell on the past. But at this time of year, I find it helpful to reflect on the past year's successes and lessons learned. After all, every experience – whether good or not so good – brings insight into how to move forward in ways that will serve us and those around us more effectively. Here are some nuggets of wisdom I'm taking with me into 2024. You should find their themes universal and applicable in your own entrepreneurial journey in the new year.

1. Growth requires planning and follow-through

During the pandemic, our company's revenue grew over 200%. With that growth came growing pains – it was a lot for our staff and systems to handle. In 2023, my company focused on making our services as secure and streamlined as possible. We realized we needed to invest the time to find new talent to help us manage multiple facets of our operations.

In 2024, consider how prepared your organization and its people are to handle growth. A revenue boom (or decline) impacts virtually every aspect of a business. Know in advance what needs to be done so that when you cross that bridge, you have a plan to handle changes seamlessly.

2. Patience fuels productivity (and quality)

Engaged leaders often have unbridled enthusiasm about making changes that will make something great even better. I've learned that while I would love to have initiatives up and running quickly, showing patience and giving team members time to do their jobs to the best of their abilities is essential. That means allowing them to address concerns, spot gaps, and strive for perfection.

No good ever comes from rushing or cutting corners. Yes, setting deadlines is a part of responsible project management, but it's critical to have reasonable expectations. That's the key to ensuring things get done right and maintaining team morale.

3. Actions speak louder than words

You've heard the cliché "talk is cheap." That's true in business and life in general. Sadly, I experienced some disappointments last year when individuals made promises they didn't keep. They set high expectations but failed to follow through, which diminished my trust in them.

The lesson here is threefold:

- Don't trust everything everyone says – trust their actions.
- If you want to be trusted and respected, deliver on your promises.
- Be transparent if you can't deliver and communicate a resolution.



4. Listening is the key to intelligent speaking

In 2023, I learned how valuable active listening is for problem-solving and relationship-building. It takes time and self-discipline to be quiet and focus intently on what people are saying, but it's worth the effort. I find it helps me articulate my thoughts and thoughtfully respond. How do you know if you're actively listening? After someone is done talking, you should be able to repeat what the person

said (verbatim or paraphrased). This allows you to give the individual an opportunity to confirm your understanding of what they said, which then enables you to offer an informed response.


5. A little appreciation goes a long way

Everyone likes to know they're valued. While I have always made it a point to tell and show my team how much I appreciate them and all they do for us, I

became more conscious of it this past year. I believe that's one reason why many of our team members have been with us for many years.


Acknowledgment for work well done, fun team development activities, occasional catered lunches, and thoughtful holiday gifts are some ways you can show your gratitude. But most impactful is to constantly remind your team members how much you value them through your everyday interactions and expressions of appreciation for their talents and efforts.

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Video Conference Call Tips

From an article in *allBusiness* featuring tips from Dr. Laura Sicola of *Vocal Impact Productions*

Just as with in-person meetings, you need to bring your "A Game" to video conference calls. Here are four tips to look and sound your best online:

1. Get the right camera angle

Take the time to set up your camera so that it frames you in a way that makes you look mature. If your head is at the bottom of the screen and there's a lot of ceiling or sky above you, you come across as disempowered. It looks like a little kid sitting on a stool at the grownups' table. It certainly doesn't look powerful or authoritative.

Try holding your hand up with your thumb and index finger about an inch apart. Place your hand on top of your head and adjust your camera so that your index finger touches the top of your screen. That's how you know you own the screen, the screen doesn't own you.

2. Create a flattering and professional setting

Connecting with your audience is already hard in a virtual setting, and bad lighting can make it even harder. You don't want to look like you're in the witness protection program. Don't sit in front of a giant picture window with the sun shining through it so you're backlit.



Your face should be well lit, so bring in a lamp from another part of the house if necessary. It's a small step that can make an important difference in the impression you leave on your audience.

If bad lighting makes it seem like you're hiding, it says to other people that you don't trust them or you're afraid of them. That does not say, "Trust me."

Dump virtual backgrounds. The tech just isn't that great yet. It makes you look like a 1990s video game character. I find it very distracting and amateur-looking. A white wall is not ideal, but it will do. For an affordable alternative, you can buy room dividers or folding screens that easily pop up and collapse. As a last resort, stick with the blur option if you have to use a

digital background.

3. Shell out for a quality microphone

If you're going to run a multi-million-dollar company, you need to prove that you are willing to drop 50 bucks on a decent mic. The built-in microphones on your computer, camera, and AirPods won't cut it: they were built as an afterthought. Get an external microphone, whether it's a headset or a standalone.

Spend at least \$50 to \$60, but if you can swing it, go up to \$100 to \$150. You don't have to get the Lamborghini version I have, but you shouldn't be riding on a skateboard.

4. Refine your video conference sales pitch

How do you know if all of this is working? You absolutely need to do some demo recordings with yourself and some friends. Watch yourself on video before pitching a client. What are you doing that isn't coming across as confident, or passionate, or charismatic? A test recording will reveal a too-dark room or an unflattering background, so you can fix them before they affect an impression of you.

The question is, what aspect of you needs to come across when you're trying to get someone to see you as confident, authoritative, in control, and diplomatic? What does "professional" look and sound like to you? That's the impression you should strive to leave.

See you at the Show!

Nor Cal Landscape & Nursery Show

Growing Forward FEB 8 2024

Trade Show and Educational Seminars

Fiesta Hall San Mateo Event Center

Coming Soon!

The Nor Cal Landscape & Nursery Show is February 8, 2024

The Nor Cal Landscape & Nursery Show is coming soon — February 8, 2024. There will be hundreds of buyers, managers and owners roaming the aisles looking for the latest products, services, and plant material. Will you be there to pitch your brand and pick up new business?

In an uncertain economy your company needs all the exposure available. Marketing has many pieces and Nor Cal should be part of yours! You can meet hundreds of buyers all in one-day, and one-place.

Nor Cal is the only professional landscape & nursery show in the northern California area.

Fast Facts About Nor Cal:

- Nor Cal is CLCA and the local nursery chapters show in the San Francisco Bay area.
- Held in Fiesta Hall at the San Mateo Event Center.
- 44 years of bringing green industry professionals together.
- 1 easy day of move-in: you'll be directed to the doors nearest your booth space. Free move-in and move-out with fork lift service for those who need it.
- Free parking on set-up day and only \$15 to park on show day.
- One dynamic show day from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- A full schedule of educational seminars.
- Meet and greet buyers from California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada and Arizona.

Pricing for booth space is as follows: 10 x 10 booths are \$1300 member/\$1450 non-member. Provide proof of membership for PCA or CLCA members. Enjoy our multi-booth discounts: 5% discount when you book 5 spaces; 15% discount booking 6-8 spaces and 30% booking 9+ spaces. Special pricing can be arranged for equipment vendors.

For a list of our current exhibitors visit www.norcaltradeshow.org, click the Exhibitor button and then the Exhibitor List.

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Moments *From an article by Mark Matteson, Sparking Success*

My life has been defined by “Moments.” What is a Moment? It’s a time in my life, an experience that changes the way I look at the world and my life. It’s a rearrangement of my values and goals. It’s a Paradigm Shift. Webster’s Dictionary defines it as: “An important change that happens when the usual way of thinking about or doing something is replaced by a new and different way.”

My Moments have defined me. They made me reflect, grateful, sad, happy, proud, devastated, different and forced me to prioritize, evaluate and change my behavior forever. They are rights of passage. Here are just a few of my life’s moments:

- Riding a Two-Wheel Bike for the first time at age 7.
- Turning 13 years old (and making the basketball team at Madrona Jr. High) I made basketball my “Magnificent Obsession” and gave me Passion, Preference and Purpose.
- Earning a basketball scholarship that paid for my college tuition and books.
- Moving out of my parents’ house at 17 years of age and getting my first apartment.
- Joining the United States Air Force to learn HVAC.
- Meeting the woman who would become my wife of 43 years in a record store.
- Having our children “Colin All Cars,” “Evan from Heaven!” adopting Larod (“L”) when he was 16 years old.
- Committing to “Windshield University” and listening to 15,000 hours of Audio Cassettes Programs over a 20-year span (Business, Spiritual, Self-Help, Biographies and Finance).
- Debbie being hit by a 16-year-old girl on vacation in Chelan on her bicycle and being forced to sell our house on the hill to keep from going under because of medical bills.
- Getting my first article published in a magazine and my first book published into 10 foreign languages.
- My father passing away from Alzheimers in 2005.
- Realizing I could make a fine living as a speaker and writer, and put three boys through college.
- Surviving an operation just before the worst recession in U.S. history which led to having to sell some real estate holdings.
- My mother passing away from cancer in 2010 and feeling like an orphan.
- Becoming a Grandfather.

Through all of these Moments, I gathered up the lessons and marched forward. The one thing I have done is right...I just kept going. Persistence. Constancy of purpose.

Thomas Jefferson wrote, “In matters of style, swim the current. In matters of principle, stand like a rock.” It’s safe to say, I stood like a

rock. I am a better man for all the moments in my life, positive and negative.

The most important question I have asked myself over the years? “How do I know it’s bad?” (Or good for that matter.) It’s always too

soon to tell. Time and tide have a way of changing our perspective, our point of view.

I am grateful for all the “Moments” in my life, both good and bad. They have defined me.

As Nora Ehpron wrote, “All life is copy.” Meaning, every single moment I have experienced has been useful once I turned it into a story with lessons to learn. I have learned from

every moment.

Mark Matteson is an inspiring speaker and the author of the international bestseller, Freedom from Fear. His company, Sparking Success, is located in Edmonds, WA. Phone: (206) 697-0454.



**MARK
MATTESON**
Sparking Success

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Utilizing AI Can Save Small Businesses Time and Money

From an article in *allBusiness* by Attorney Neil Hare, with the law firm McCarthy Wilson LLP

While many business owners are still trying to figure out exactly what artificial intelligence (AI) means for them, a new report from the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council (SBEC) shows that a large percentage of small businesses are using AI tools and vastly improving efficiency and saving hundreds of billions of dollars annually.

In addition to saving time and money, the main driver for adopting AI tools is the number-one issue facing small businesses at the moment: a tight labor market. Coming out of Covid, more small businesses are having to deal with finding and retaining workers. Unemployment is at historic lows, and with remote work still widely available, many workers can now take jobs all over the country, leaving local retailers, restaurants, and manufacturing plants with fewer options for talent.

Since small-town workers can earn big-city wages working remotely, this has also led to an unsustainable rise in worker pay for small

businesses. According to the SBEC report, 25% of small businesses said rising labor costs led them to AI tools; 19% said they moved to AI to augment the skills of existing workers or because they were unable to find skilled workers.

In addition to workforce issues, almost one-third of businesses surveyed by SBEC cited the need to compete with other businesses, including larger companies, as their reason to turn to AI.



Downsides of AI for Small Businesses

While AI tools are here to stay, that doesn't mean there are no downsides:

Continued on page 13

Product Pricing Strategies from Page 6

"To avoid making the same mistake, I would advise other startup leaders to take the time to calculate all the costs involved in a job, including labor, materials, overhead, and any unforeseen expenses. It's important to set a fair price that reflects the true value of your services and ensures that your business remains profitable. Remember that it's better to charge a higher price upfront than to underestimate costs and end up losing money in the long run."

—Todd Lannen, *Lannen's Lawn & Sprinkler LLC*

Conduct audience pricing research

"One pricing mistake I've made is not doing pricing research with our audience. Your audience can give you value pricing feedback if you ask the right questions:

1. What's a price so exorbitantly high that it would be a non-conversation starter?
2. What's a price so low that you would question our credibility as a business?
3. What's a price that's a little hefty but could be reasonable if you could see the value?
4. What's a price that you would think is a great deal, but not suspiciously cheap?"

—Joe Kevens, *B2B SaaS Reviews*

Factor in shipping costs

"One pricing mistake I have made is not considering the costs of shipping and handling when setting the prices of my products. This oversight led to lower profit margins and even resulted in a loss on certain sales.

"To help other startup leaders avoid this mistake, I recommend carefully calculating and factoring in shipping costs when determining product pricing. This includes considering not just the shipping fees, but also the costs of packaging materials and any additional labor required for handling the orders. By ensuring that all costs are accounted for in the product pricing, an e-commerce business can maintain healthy profit margins and avoid unexpected financial setbacks related to shipping expenses."

—Damjan Tanaskovic, *Localizely*

Develop buyer personas

"When we launched our first product, we used a very amateur means of pricing it. Essentially, we looked at what competitors were charging and made our best guess as to what our 'typical buyer' would be willing to pay.

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Utilizing AI from page 12

Lack of creativity: First of all, the information provided by AI writing tools is often wrong, and the writing style can be stilted and lack a human element (as a writer I'm compelled to say that!). That same lack of creativity is also a common problem with many AI tools.

Missing an emotional element: AI also lacks the emotional element that humans bring to the table. While too much emotion in the workplace may be detrimental, empathy and decision-making based on a lifetime of experiences do matter when managing people and working as a team.

Robotics are expensive: If you're talking robotics, that is still an expensive proposition. Standard robots that can do one task have been around for a long time and may be affordable, but robots that can think and take on multiple and complex tasks are still very expensive.

Fear of Skynet: The fear of "Skynet" – the AI company that took over the world of humans in the iconic movie The Terminator – is real. Our government is working feverishly to legislate and regulate against a similar dystopian nightmare.

Consider Using AI in Your Business

For now, you owe it to your business and your customers to explore AI tools. In our economy, where time and money both matter, AI will help with both. And, for the record, no AI tools were used in writing this article!

~KURAPIA~
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Celebrating Life Throughout the New Year

A Timeless Dave Junod New Year's Message from the Past

God is timeless, and unchanging, and is the source, continuity, and conclusion of every season. We all are individualizations of this life's experience and understanding as we embrace the wonderful cycles of our lives, knowing the ending of one marks the beginning of the greater yet to be.

TODAY – we all stand on the threshold of a New Year knowing that each one of us is endowed with the qualities necessary for our success in every season. We close the door to the past, knowing that each of us has completed our expectations. It is through thinking and understanding that God is always at the center and circumference of all our interactions. We all can “take a moment” to be thankful for the love shared, the blessings received, and the lessons learned.

I believe that we all have a clarity of purpose and with love as the motive force of our very existence that we all co-create each of our futures. We all understand – especially in our vocations – that our thinking sends the message of our desire to our subconscious and that every thought is creative. Our thinking is life-enhancing, and our actions return blessings to all involved. As we become more and more aware that we are guided by a Divine Essence, our lives become extraordinary. Who we are is a gift from a power greater than ourselves. I am a still-learning person in this journey.

Life is a celebration and so it is as we negotiate into this cycle of life...the New Year. The goodness in all that we do replicates itself through creation.

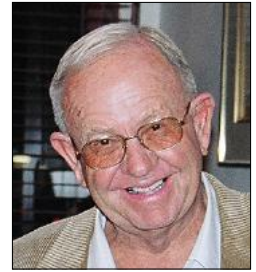
We find God within ourselves, and God can work for us only by working through us.
– Ernest Holmes

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- Enough friends to give you comfort,*
- Enough wealth to meet your needs,*
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- Recipients include all SFV chapter members, other chapter presidents, State CLCA officers, and other Green Industry VIPs.
- A growing list of potential members and other C-27 landscape contractors will also receive the monthly email version of *Valleyscape*.
- Additionally, four of these same issues are *ALSO* printed and sent via US Mail to chapter members, state staff and officers, advertisers, and other Green Industry decision-makers.

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