

# IT'S GOOD TO TALK



**Sean Butler** says good communication is key to any business's success and offers advice on getting it right

Good quality communication is essential in all aspects of life, not just business. If you analyse any situation, problem or outcome that went wrong, it is normally down to a lack of it.

Getting your staff to understand the importance of good communication is key to your success. Even if you're a small company or a sole trader, lack of communication with your clients, suppliers and sub-contractors can lead to a financial loss. A favourite quote of mine is the seven Ps: Prior Project Planning Prevents P\*\*s Poor Performance. Coarse but true. Understanding that there are three main ways in which people learn is also very important. These are: auditory, visual and kinaesthetic. In the

“ **GETTING YOUR STAFF TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD COMMUNICATION IS KEY TO YOUR SUCCESS** ”

landscaping industry we would use the auditory method at weekly meetings, and when talking through a project. This would be backed up with a visual aid, such as the design, along with Gantt charts detailing the works and estimated timings. The kinaesthetic method can then be communicated by your onsite foreman through demonstration of work techniques.

My favourite communication tool has always been the use of Gantt charts. These can be handwritten, but it's time consuming. There are many templates available online or you can create your own bespoke ones, as we do now. From just a simple project that might take four weeks, to year-long-plus projects, Gantt charts track when all actions are timetabled, such as: start-up, excavations and clearance, ducting,

Project start date: 7th May 2015		RHS CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW 2015															
PROJECT NAME: BREAKTHROUGH BREAST CANCER SHOW GARDEN	WEEK 1 BUILD				WEEK 2 BUILD				WEEK 3 SHOW				WEEK 4 BREAKDOWN				
TASK TO BE CARRIED OUT	Th	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	M	T	W	Th	F	M	T	
SET OUT THE GARDEN/TREES (USING TELEHANDLER FROM RHS)	█																
EXCAVATE WATER FEATURE AREA (USING CUBE DIGGER AND RHS DUMPER )	█																
EXCAVATE PATHWAY (USING CUBE DIGGER AND RHS DUMPER)	█																
LAY GEOTEXTILE MEMBRANE	█																
LAY CONCRETE PADS/BLOCKS	█																
PLANT TAXUS HEDGE	█																
POSITION 'I' BEAM	█																
PLANT SILVER BIRCH (USING TELEHANDLER FROM RHS)	█	█															
SET OUT WATER FEATURES (USING TELEHANDLER FROM RHS) AND FIX INTO PLACE		█															
BUILD SHUTTERING		█															
SUB-BASE PATH			█														
LAY PATH			█	█													
METAL EDGING			█	█													
PROTECT PAVING, CLING FILM			█	█													
SOIL PREPARATION				█													
FILL AND TEST WATER FEATURES					█												
PLANTING					█	█	█	█	█								
ADD DYE TO WATER FEATURES									█								
PLACE GRAVEL BETWEEN TANKS									█								
REMOVAL OF LARGE TREES, SCULPTURES, PLANTING, HARD LANDSCAPING															█	█	
DRAIN WATER POOLS															█	█	

Sean's Chelsea 2015 project timeline as a Gantt chart

first fix electrics, sub base, paving, scheduled meetings, deliveries in, plant hire in and off hire.

Before starting each project, hold a meeting to discuss the schedule as set out in the Gantt chart, managing your team's expectations and your client's in parallel. We hold meetings with all foremen every Monday so they can work collaboratively, sharing labour and/or equipment in the most productive fashion, and to ensure jobs stay on track. In turn, the foremen talk to their teams, making sure they know what's expected of them by Friday.

With the use of a Gantt chart, the teams can also see what's in and out of the scope of work. So if they come across an unforeseen problem where, for example, a design change is required, then this can be communicated back to the designer and then the client. Additional works are

often going to arise as we haven't got X-ray eyes, but they should never be undertaken without prior approval of either the client or designer. We can never assume the client will not mind paying as this is bad practice and can be costly if additional works are not agreed.

Good communication throughout will ensure projects are completed on time and within budget. Every business has its own forms of communication and should use the tools that work for them.

### ABOUT SEAN BUTLER

Sean Butler is a landscape designer and director of Cube 1994. With a background in civil engineering, Sean has an in-depth understanding of the design, construction and maintenance of the physical and naturally built landscape. [www.cube1994.com](http://www.cube1994.com)