

Landscape Ontario Podcast: GROWing Confident Leaders, Charlotte Cascioli

Host: Karina Sinclair

Guests: Charlotte Cascioli

Transcription

Karina Sinclair: Welcome to the Landscape Ontario Podcast. I'm your host, Karina Sinclair. The demand for skilled workers in landscape and horticulture is higher than ever. In response, Landscape Ontario created GROW. For those who don't know about this initiative, GROW is a free government-funded training program. It's been designed to help new workers gain the essential skills needed to find jobs and connect with employers in the green trades. In addition to training new workers, GROW also has programs to help individuals move up the ladder! That's where today's guest comes in.

Charlotte Cascioli is a facilitator for the Supervisory Foundations program at GROW. Charolette has been involved in the landscaping industry since she was a teenager, working alongside her dad in his landscaping company. Now, Charolette is a certified HR leader and has close to 25 years of experience, with nearly a decade of experience specifically within the landscaping industry. She has developed, implemented, and facilitated a range of supervisory and management workshops, including engagement, culture, recruitment, conflict resolution, and communication. She currently provides HR consulting services to landscape contractors, facilitates HR peer groups, and provides specialized services around temporary foreign workers, as well as engagement and retention of staff, and HR efficiencies.

We're going to talk to Charolette about her role with the GROW program, and how she helps participants develop the confidence and communication skills needed to succeed as a leader in the workplace.

Music Interlude

Karina Sinclair: Thanks so much for joining us here on the Landscape Ontario Podcast, Charolette. Let's get right into the conversation. Labour shortages continue to be a challenge for employers. From your perspective as a human resource professional, what do you think would help employers fill their vacant roles? Are they missing something in their current recruitment efforts?

Charolette Cascioli: I love that question, Karina. And yeah, definitely, we are certainly facing labour shortages still within our industry and just overall. The Canadian Survey of Business Conditions just launched information on this, saying that rising inflation, shortage of labour force and retaining and recruiting skilled employees are still the leading challenge that businesses are facing. So how do we respond?

Yeah, that's a great question. We really do need to be looking outside of our industry. That's that's one of the suggestions I always make to our contractors that I speak to. When you see a resumé come through your desk, don't just don't just exclude that candidate because they don't have landscaping experience. Look beyond that.

Even before COVID, our talent pool has been shrinking. We need to stop looking for the multiple years of experience and look for aptitude and train the rest. There's definitely a war on talent and there's higher expectations from candidates because they now have choice. There's been some phenomenal stories that I've been able to see and experience in the GROW Supervisory program of just outstanding supervisors and lead hands that just came completely outside of our industry, like culinary and retail. Even GMs and senior managers and business owners completely outside of the industry fitting right in and building the skills from there. So I just think we definitely need to be looking outside of our industry. And often when I talk to contractors, a lot of them already say this, but making sure we hire for attitude versus aptitude, I think that's a really good, important concept to deal with this labour shortage.

Again, this is going back to the fact that Landscape Ontario has phenomenal training programs that are very unique, I think, for small-medium businesses, which I think we should be taking full advantage of. We have new entrants that are being trained for four weeks on health and safety and plant ID and weed identification, turf grass. You know, these are things that we don't have time to train people on.

So why not make use of this New Entrant program? And then when you have it, when you have an employee that is doing really well in those skills, but also are showing and demonstrating leadership capabilities, why not put them in the supervisory training program? I mean, these are opportunities for you to take advantage of and it's completely free. And it's a phenomenal program. It's 16 hours worth of training on foundational supervisory skills, along with coaching sessions and intake and goal setting. I mean, this is like top notch training that's being provided free to our contractors. So make use of that.

And the other thing I would suggest is, is looking outside of our country. We can't always fill positions within Canada and this is becoming more and more apparent is to expand our talent

pools outside of Canada. So seeking talent through immigration sources like foreign workers, something I've been very involved with. Just a very helpful thing to add to your roster of employees and to your talent pool options.

Karina: I want to dive into the GROW program a little bit more, but just for a second, backtrack to where you said the labour pool is shrinking. Why is that? Why aren't there as many people available to take these kinds of roles?

Charolette: Yeah, that's I mean, that's a great question. I think there's just a lot less students going into the trades to begin with. So like the entrance point, there's just a lot less interest for some reason. And I can't put my finger on it because it's an amazing industry. So starting right from the feeder of schools, you have a lot less interest from students going into the trades. And this is this is apparent across all the trades, not just landscaping. A lot of the trades are really losing skilled workers.

Karina: You mentioned hiring outside of the country. The temporary foreign worker program is definitely something that's gotten a lot of attention. But the rules seem to be always changing. And there's new regulations and policies. Is that something that you can help companies do, or are there people that that can help landscape company navigate all those changing policies to create a really welcoming environment for these foreign workers?

Charolette: Absolutely. I mean, it's really unfortunate that there is an option to bring in temporary foreign workers but there's a lot of red tape. And an 18-page form is quite daunting. And it's probably 40 hours worth of work. At least I've found that.

That's what I do all the time. I work with multiple clients to bring in temporary foreign workers, provide assistance on how to fill out that form, but more importantly, the business rationale and the posting requirements, the recruitment protocol that needs to be followed in order to justify your case to bring in a non-Canadian-resident worker.

So that's a really key piece. But what's really beneficial about this is that the government is... I've never had a negative [Labour Market Impact Assessment](#) (LMIA). That's really great news because the government is recognizing that our industry needs workers. And even though we're seasonal in some in some cases we are demonstrating very successfully that we don't have candidates for our positions.

And that's kind of a reality. And I think there's definitely awareness of that reality. And so the approvals of the market assessments are being made and candidates are coming across from

Barbados, Philippines, Mexico, El Salvador, multiple countries. And I think that's a really great opportunity for our contractors, is to expand their talent pool across the borders.

Karina: And what kind of skills and qualities are these foreign workers bringing into the workplace?

Charolette: Yes, there's definitely a difference in work ethic. They are coming, they're desperate for work, their employment opportunities are a lot less in their countries. Their unemployment rates are significantly higher, like 30 to 40 per cent in these countries versus in Canada. So it's a huge opportunity for these individuals. And so they're just so much more keen to come over to work hard to provide for their families back home. And that demonstrates in their work ethic in the organizations that they're part of. Their passion is just that much higher.

Karina: That's really fascinating. I guess we maybe don't appreciate what we have and, there's lots of room for us within the industry to continue to make it be an attractive place to work.

Charolette: Mmm hmmm.

Karina: When attracting ideal candidates to a company, how important is that culture? What's something that attracts job seekers to a company based on their culture?

Charolette: I love that question, too, because I think so many times we just think it's about compensation or benefits or the additional perks. But research time and time again points to job seekers looking for a number of factors.

Pleasant working environment and culture is still ranking as one of the most important components of choosing an employer. You're spending a third of your time at work. You want to make sure that it's a really great culture and employees that are seeking positions and opportunities are still considering that as one of their number one things. They're interviewing you just as much as you're interviewing them in that interview process.

And I think because of that, in order to again, expand your talent pools, what are you offering to these employees? How are you setting yourself apart? Would you want to work for your company? So those are the kinds of questions I always encourage to think about is what are you offering and are you making it advantageous for them to choose you over another company? And culture is a big part of that.

Karina: Considering a business owner has so many responsibilities and tasks to worry about, what are the risks of not taking the time to invest in company culture?

Charolette: They're huge. They're huge! I mean, the research even backs that up. I just read the other day that 84 per cent of the value of the 500 largest and most profitable companies comes from the talent, skills and knowledge, work ethic and health of its employee. I mean, that's huge. Eighty-four per cent of the value is coming from their employees, including their work ethic and health of their employees.

Company culture is absolutely huge and daily stress still remains at a record high. A majority of the workers are not engaged. And companies are going to ask themselves what can be done to foster a strong culture of connection and engagement. If we don't invest in our people, we're not investing in the heart of a successful organization.

We have to prioritize the human element of our businesses and recognize that productivity and efficiency come when employees are engaged and inspired and connected to their coworkers. And of course, this all comes from our culture that we're building in our companies.

Karina: We talked about engagement. How could a business owner or people leader recognize the red flags or identify employees who are not fully engaged? What does that look like in a landscaping and horticulture business environment?

Charolette: Right. So when an employee is not really engaged in their workplace, they're going to be very discretionary where they put their effort and their energy. So they're going to do things like calling in sick frequently. They're going to come in late.

They're not going to be fully engaged in your team meetings. They're only going to perform exactly what you say that they're supposed to do in their job. And they're not really going to go outside of that and come up with new ideas and solutions. And they're going to consistently miss deadlines. They're going to lack enthusiasm.

There's this terminology that's been floating around lately. It's called quiet quitting. And essentially it's what it says. It's the employees just quietly quitting. They're just going to be only giving the bare minimum in their workday. So they're not going above and beyond for your clients, by maybe seeing that garbage that needs to be picked up and pick that garbage piece up and and make sure their lawn is looking extra superb and maybe moving furniture properly. They're going to just do the bare minimum, cut the grass, get out of there and not give it their full effort. And your company is going to suffer as a result of that. You want to tap into your

employees' discretionary effort. And that's what building a company culture is. And that's why the 500 largest, most profitable companies, it comes from the work ethic and the engagement of their staff.

Karina: So this situation can be rescued?

Charolette: Absolutely. It can be rescued. Yes, absolutely can be rescued.

Karina: It's good to know that there's still a chance to bring in those employees that maybe have just only temporarily checked out, but there's still a chance to bring them into the fold.

Charolette: Absolutely.

Karina: It seems like Landscape Ontario's GROW training program, you touched on this earlier, could be really helpful in building some of these critical skills at all levels of an organization. Tell me about your involvement with the Foundational Supervisory training program that is offered through GROW.

Charolette: Yes. I have the opportunity to facilitate the GROW Foundational Supervisory program. And it's been a huge, tremendous blessing for me. Really amazing program. Sixteen hours, like I said, of training, coaching session opportunities. There's a change project embedded into the program. Critical skills are being developed and nurtured. So, techniques in building communication and building trust.

How does a team form and develop and how do you lead through those changes effectively? How do you manage conflict? Conflict is inevitable. It's actually positive, but how do you manage through that conflict? What are some strategies and tools? We talk through that. Building communication skills and understanding barriers to communication, and there's a lot of self-reflective exercises built into the program, which I really love.

And we've also built in a lot of case studies that are very relevant to what all of our individuals are facing on a day to day basis. In fact, that's what I really love about this program is it's quite different from all the corporate training facilitation that I've done. Employees typically in a corporate background are told to attend. There's minimum interest and commitment. But in this program, attendees are nominated because of their leadership capabilities. They want to be there. They want to grow and develop, and the owner is often very closely connected to that individual as they go through this program.

Karina: Does this training work for any kind of landscape business, or is it mostly geared towards design/build companies?

Charolette: It's really for any landscaping, construction, irrigation, hardscape, softscape, maintenance, snow removal. Anyone within this umbrella of our industry is able to attend and participate in this program. We have over 85 participants already signed up and they're from a wide variety of companies across that industry.

Karina: Do you have any examples of success stories of people who've come into the supervisory training and moved up in their career?

Charolette: Well, the entire premise of this program is to provide attendees with the knowledge and tools to effectively manage, engage and empower their team, but also prepare them to assume a leadership role or supervisory role, or give them the skills for a newly assigned leadership role. So a big portion of this program is propelling them into those roles, and they're nominated into the program because they're already demonstrating some leadership capabilities. And this program is just going to propel them to be successful in that leadership role. That's kind of the qualifier thing there.

Again, I've seen some really amazing situations where individuals are coming from culinary or they're coming from retail or they were a GM at another company or even I've had one like Walmart greeters or supervisory individuals. They're coming into our industry and they have a lot of skills they get to learn, like how do you manage conflict within a team in the landscaping industry? What are some of the things that you're going to experience? And they leave that program feeling very equipped and ready to take on the challenges that they're facing.

Another really unique thing about this program is that you're with your peers. And so we often break out into breakout groups and they're comparing the case studies that are very relevant to our industry. They're things that happen all the time and they get to talk through those situations, come up with solutions together and learn from their peers as well, which is a very helpful piece in the program.

Karina: Have you noticed any recurring obstacles experienced by the program participants? Are they coming with the right mindset or have they had a lot of experiences that create barriers to them moving forward until they take a program like this?

Charolette: Yeah, great question. I mean, every year we actually review evaluation feedback and we take considerable notice of obstacles that participants come into the program with and we

build into the program for the following year to ensure that the content is kept up to date and most beneficial for our participants. I would say the reoccurring obstacle that I've seen — and I don't really think it's an obstacle, I think this is the benefit of the program — is that they're going to be able to build and work on their confidence or lack thereof. Being new to leadership and managing a team is extremely daunting and scary. Do they have the tools to succeed and therefore have the confidence to be in that leadership role? A lot of the programming and the learning that they're going to take in take place in this program is going to infuse that confidence into them.

And the other thing that we've really noticed is just how do you handle conflict diplomatically. Conflict with a client or customer that's really difficult to deal with. A colleague. Even your manager. How do you deal with those conflicts effectively and diplomatically and get to the next level in that relationship and communication? Because conflict doesn't have to end there. It can propel us into a better relationship with those individuals. So those are the two reoccurring things I see. But as a result of this program, they're that much more able to succeed in their roles.

Karina: Certainly, addressing conflict can move us into better relationships and not addressing it can just keep something festering and creating a low grade issue. A fever, so to speak, throughout a company that's really hard to resolve.

Confidence and conflict management definitely go hand in hand. Why do you think confidence is such a common problem and how can addressing it resolve workplace conflict?

Charolette: Yeah, I think new supervisors or those in leadership roles can be really shy and they doubt what they have to share and they're fearing what they're saying isn't relevant. I mean, I remember being there in the earlier stages of my career, so it's very close to home for me. Giving them the skills to be more confident in what they're bringing to the table is so paramount and they don't share because there's a lack of confidence which limits their ability to communicate.

When you're self-confident around others, you're definitely more relaxed. You're in control, you're flexible, you treat others well, you have more belief in yourself and you're easier to communicate with and you're more objective. So all of these things through this program is going to help them build their confidence.

I saw it firsthand in our breakout exercises. We would do an exercise with a group of individuals, and they had to individually rate the answers to the exercise, and then they had to

rate it as a group. And the individual numbers were closer to the right answers than the group was, in some cases. And often those individuals, it's because they had the answer, but they were afraid to share it. They were afraid that maybe they were wrong or that they doubted their expertise in a certain area and they weren't confident to bring that to the table.

So to me, that's huge, because then as a leader, if I was managing a team, then I'm missing out on one or two people in my team because they're not confident to share their ideas. But those ideas could be very, very important to hear, and I want them to be more confident in bringing those ideas to the table.

And that just comes through knowing your own self, knowing that what you do bring to the table is very, very paramount. And this foundational program is, I think, just a skill and confidence builder.

Karina: These skills are not just useful in a job or employment situation, but in life in general, so anyone taking the GROW Supervisory program would emerge as a better person all around, I would think.

Charolette: Absolutely, I mean, even the conflict management, I mean, I have a teenage daughter, so...

Karina: Enough said!

Charolette: There you go, right? Let's apply this conflict management to my teenage daughter. Yes. Yeah. It's very relevant to all to our personal lives as well as our relationships outside of work.

Karina: What are some scenarios where these difficult conversations might come up in the landscaping environment? It might be hard to imagine what's causing these conflicts, but what are the common things that come up in the kinds of businesses that you work with?

Charolette: Well, even the infamous performance review that is quite daunting and can be very confrontational. That's one piece for sure.

Even just communicating changes to your employees. A change in work process, a change in a benefit plan, a change in a customer the company has lost and now you're having to communicate that to your crew.

Client relationships! I mean, COVID was really heightened, right? You had some customers that were just very upset with how the company might be handling COVID or not handling it well enough or not coming to their property.

So there was just a lot of conflict in those areas. So those are just some examples that I've seen within our industry. But again, having the tools to diplomatically handle and communicate and work through those stages of conflict with a client or a customer or a confrontational performance review or communicating a change, like we actually have embedded a lot of these scenarios within our program so that it's just real life examples that they're dealing with. And they come up with their own, as well, so we work through those too. So very relevant and applicable.

Karina: That's great. Do you have any favourite resources to recommend to business owners or people leaders who want to build better teams but don't know where to start?

Charolette: That's a hard question because I love to read and I feel like every resource is awesome. But I would have to say that one of my personal favourites is a book that outlines strengths. I get really weary of focusing on weaknesses of our shortcomings. And research actually tells us time and time again that we need to spend our energy and invest our energy on developing our strengths instead of correcting our weaknesses.

There's a book written by Tom Rath called *StrengthFinders*. It outlines 34 of the most common talents and there's actually an assessment built into their book. And so you can do it online and it pops out your five strengths. I mean, there's multiple strengths that you can have, but your five dominant strengths. And to my younger self, this was a very helpful tool as I maneuvered around different opportunities and responsibilities and work. I just kind of more gravitated and knew where to go with my abilities and my strengths to align with that.

And of course, if you focus more on your strengths, you're going to be more likely to be engaged in your job. So there's that word again, Karina, that the engagement piece and I often coach clients and individuals on this, you know, everybody has skills and strengths. Why not focus on those and create more of a positive environment instead of focusing on the weaknesses of individuals?

We all have weaknesses. We're not perfect, but focusing on the positives... and this goes for parenting as well, right? Focusing on the positives you're just going to get a lot more from that individual in that relationship than if you would focus on the negatives.

Another favourite book of mine is Pat Lencioni's *Working Genius*. A groundbreaking model. And he also has an assessment of gifts and frustrations. So he talks about in his book, kind of like six working geniuses: wonder, discernment, invention, galvanizing, tenacity, enablement. And then once you identify your actual working genius, you'll also know your working frustrations. So you want to kind of stay away from those working frustrations and you want to stick with the working genius, really good team environment assessment.

This is really helpful because once everybody knows what their working genius is, then you can tap into those individuals at different times within a project or a task that you need to do. So for example, I'm a big wonderer, and so I'm not allowed to come in meetings when they're executing because I'm just going to throw everybody off and come up with new ideas. So that's just a really helpful thing for me to know, but also for my team to know.

Karina: I could see that being of great value, especially to identify the gaps of opportunity on a team and what skills or attributes of somebody you might be looking for to bring into the team specifically.

Like you said earlier, hiring for attitude, not aptitude, and knowing that maybe you do need somebody who can think big questions or they're really great at research or they're really good at seeing a project all the way through to the end and making sure that all the boxes are checked without adding new ideas along the way. I've been in those work environments where those strengths have been celebrated, and that is a really exciting place to be.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with our listeners?

Charolette: I'm biased, I'm the facilitator of the program, but if you don't have staff in the [GROW Supervisory Foundational](#) program, get in next year. It's a phenomenal program.

Tap into the [New Entrant](#) program. There's just so many resources available, and I know some times we're running at 100 miles an hour, but just intentionally planning for that next year I think is a really good business strategy.

And then there's also [Employer of Choice](#), which is a phenomenal program. So there's lots of resources available to you. And so I just say jump into them.

And the other thing I just wanted to say is a special thank you to an amazing team that supported me and managed the entire intake process and all the administrative details. I want

to do a big shout out to Vicki Thompson and Hazel Cho; they've both been amazing. So thanks, guys!

Karina: They are really amazing. The GROW program and the GROW team are always working really hard to make it a better experience for everybody.

I've spent some time with the new entrants. As photographer, videographer, I sometimes will join the teams when they're on the grounds of Landscape Ontario in Milton and I get to witness what they're learning and absorbing. And the instructors, facilitators are so generous with their knowledge. The students are, you're right, they're from all walks of life, different parts of the country, different parts of the world, different parts in their life stage and they all have this united desire to create a greener world, which is very exciting.

And then to know that they can move from new entrant up to the supervisory training, up to employers of choice, there's a real progression in the career so that you may come in as somebody who trims hedges and weeds a garden, but you can really progress and build a lucrative and meaningful career.

Charolette: Absolutely.

Karina: What is your motivation for helping landscape companies or business owners? What drives you?

Charolette: So what drives me is employee culture, employee engagement, training people, equipping leaders, equipping owners, giving them the tools. I mean, I have I have a plethora of HR experience. I've been doing this a long time, but I think as I get older, you know, you have your strengths and you gravitate towards those, right?

I just have a passion for this industry. I have a passion for the wholeness, just the green aspect of this industry. I love the individuals in this industry. And I think there's just so much technical skill within our industry, but not as much the 'how to build a culture and how to engage your employees.'

And, you know, often it starts with just a truck, a trailer and an owner, and then it builds and grows and grows and grows. And then we turn into this awkward teenager and we don't know what to do with all these employees. And so that's my passion is to help and support that owner, manager or senior leader, the GM with how do you engage your staff?

How do you even know if they're engaged? How do you build out an amazing culture? And training and development is part of that, which is another passion of mine. I've done a lot of facilitation, but facilitation is just a conversation. It's just drawing out information and providing a resource. So, that's what I would say drives me.

Karina: That's very good. That's a great reason to do what you do. I'm sure our listeners feel ready and energized to continue to improve the culture at their own companies. Hopefully, lots of these people leaders will identify some of their employees that would be great candidates for the supervisory program and you'll see some of those coming up in your next sessions.

Charolette: That would be great. Thanks, Karina. Thanks so much for having me. I really appreciate the time.

Karina: What a great chat. Thank you.

Music Interlude

Did today's conversation get you excited about enriching the culture at your company? No matter where you are in your career journey, you have the capacity to be a positive influence within your team. It just takes confidence, a willingness to reflect on your own emotional intelligence, and the dedication to building better relationships through diplomacy and respect.

If you would like to learn more about the Landscape Ontario GROW programs, visit the website: growtraining.ca. I know the GROW team would be delighted to help answer your questions.

If you'd like to connect with Charolette and learn more about her HR insights and services, you can email her at SimplifiedHRConsulting@gmail.com.

For your reference, we'll have a full transcription and relevant links for today's interview on this episode's web page at landscapeontario.com/podcast.

Don't forget that registration for Landscape Ontario Congress is now open. Congress is a one-stop-shop for the latest equipment, tools, materials and supplies; everything you need to do what you do best.

Our media sponsor, Landscape Trades magazine, would like to invite you to Congress. Go to locongress.com to register and use the VIP promo code: LTLOC24 for free passes to the full trade show experience, including the LIVE stage, student gardens, and the tailgate party. Again

that VIP promo code is LTLOC24. Be sure to drop by the Landscape Trades booth for free magazines and pitch your story ideas.

Thank you so much for listening to the Landscape Ontario podcast. We talk to all kinds of innovative and knowledgeable landscape professionals, so be sure to subscribe to catch new episodes for inspiration every month.

Resources mentioned in this episode

[GROW Program](#)

[New Entrant](#)

[Supervisory Foundational Skills](#)

[Employers of Choice](#)

[StrengthsFinder 2.0](#) (now known as CliftonStrengths)

[Working Genius](#) by Pat Lencioni

[Labour Market Impact Assessment](#)

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