

Landscape Ontario Podcast

Four-day workweek: What would you do with an extra day?

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Guests: Jessie Taynton, Dicam Landscaping

Transcription

INTRO:

Welcome back to another episode of Landscape Ontario Podcast, where we delve into innovative ideas shaping the future of landscaping. I'm your host, Karina Sinclair, and today we're stepping into uncharted territory as we explore a groundbreaking concept that's been gaining momentum — the four-day workweek.

Let me ask you something. What would you do with an extra day to yourself? Would you take the time to learn a new hobby? Work on a side hustle? Get extra sleep? Play with your kids? Travel? Imagine all the things you could accomplish with that extra day.

The traditional Monday-to-Friday grind has long been the standard, but maybe it's time to consider a change! In this episode, we'll be discussing the potential benefits, challenges and real-world experiences of embracing a compressed work schedule.

To learn how this might work for a landscaping company, we're going to talk to Jessie Taynton, the HR manager at Dicam Landscaping. Dicam dared to reimagine the workweek back in 2019, and they've launched this benefit for their maintenance crew and office staff. Stick around to hear how Dicam's company culture has been enriched by something Jessie considers "life-changing."

Music transition

INTERVIEW:

Karina: Thanks again for joining us here in the Landscape Ontario Podcast. Jessie I'm really excited to hear more from you about how and why Dicam instituted a four-day workweek.

Jessie: Thanks so much for having me on. It's such a pleasure and I'm really honoured to be able to speak about this really great initiative that we've implemented in our company and all the benefits and the impact that having the four-day workweek schedule has for our teams.

Karina: I think it is a really exciting thing to consider. So let's dive right in. Can you share with our listeners the motivation behind transitioning to a four-day workweek at Dicam?

Jessie: I want to start off with our company values of Speak, Smile and Serve. They're really our anchor of how we do business and how we have the employee experience implemented in the company with that culture. We consistently try to implement progressive policies and processes to help make the employee experience better. A work-life balance is really important to us.

So finding ways to offer more flexibility to our staff is something we continuously strive for. So the idea of the four-day workweek schedule actually came back in 2019. So before the pandemic, the management team was already thinking about creative ways to help with employee engagement. So this idea came to be and the first thing they did was write out a pros and cons list for this initiative.

They really wanted to see what would be good about it, what the challenges would be to make a good informed decision to move forward with something like that. So after making that list --- I saw the chart and there are a lot more pros than cons on that list --- with so many positive points for the employees and for the business, they gave it a go.

And so we've implemented it with our lawn maintenance division. We do a four-day workweek schedule for the cut, trim and blow season. So since the landscaping industry isn't quite like a 9 to 5 industry Monday to Friday, this was a good compromise to give the staff some more flexibility. Spring clean ups and fall clean ups, they're busy. Snow doesn't have a schedule, so it's the later spring, summer hours we thought would work best for this and also some of the office staff do get to have a four-day schedule year round as well. So we implemented this with a few of our divisions and so far it's been amazing.

While researching about four-day workweeks, I was looking at one study, according to a Bankrate study that was done in 2023. So 83% of millennials and Gen Z workers support a four-day workweek. And looking through our staff data, over 70% of our staff are millennials and Gen Z workers. So, we are always trying to think, what's the next best thing that we can do for our staff? We've got a lot of young staff that's part of our team. So catering to their interest in their lives outside of work, they want to do good work while they're in the workplace, but they really want to enjoy what they're doing outside of the workplace as well. So we thought

this would be a good way to help engage the younger generations, and we have a multi-generational staff and they enjoy it too.

So across the generations it's been really great. But just seeing from the research where there is an overwhelming amount of positive support for something like this, we wanted to get in front of it so we could use it as a great recruitment and retention tool.

Karina: That's really fascinating that it's working so well for your grounds maintenance team and the office team. Is there any resentment or negative feelings from other crews that because of what they do, they can't operate in this way? Or does it feel like something that's accepted as a benefit even if somebody can't participate?

Jessie: So that was one of the cons on the list when the management team looked at this. But within the other divisions, their priorities are a little bit different. The other divisions, they want to put in lots of hours to support the lifestyles that they have right now. So there isn't really a lot of tension around that. And it's a lot about flexibility, like listening to our staff.

We don't have things one way and that's it for forever. We really try to listen to the staff. what currently works for them. What might work for them in the future. So part of it is just continuously surveying our staff to see 'does this work? Is there something more that we can be doing for them?' And if there's a collective desire, is it something that we can ease into the business that would be beneficial for the employees but also beneficial for business as well?

Karina: And how did the hours get distributed? Are employees expected to put in longer days to make up time? Those who are working on the maintenance crew ... what does their day and week look like?

Jessie: So our four-day schedule is Monday to Thursdays. And the Friday is a catch up day or a rain day. So if the weather is great and they go out Monday through Thursday, but say, for example, it's really rainy on Wednesday, it's a wash. So we have that Friday as a catch up day.

They're still working those four-days. It's just shifted to accommodate the weather. But that generally means they get a long weekend pretty much every weekend, which they really like. And the hours are once again tied into our flexibility, our work-life balance, wanting to serve our staff.

We try to make sure that the days aren't 12 hours long. We make sure that our schedules are reasonable and that we don't overload them so that they're out at seven in the morning and

they come back at seven in the evening. That's maybe a very rare occasion that the days are that long. A standard day for our crew is about eight to nine hours.

Karina: So with this position, is it still considered full time or are they part time?

Jessie: The average workweek would be usually between 30 to 35 hours. For the staff that still falls in the full time category.

Karina: And what's been the overall response from employees?

Jessie: Very positive. We frequently do different kinds of surveys to look at the feedback around their satisfaction, their well-being, and it frequently comes up in feedback that they really appreciate having the four-day schedule. Whenever I talk to candidates or do interviews or phone screens about it, they're shocked, in a good way! It's interesting when I'm in an interview and I talk to someone and tell them about how we work in the green season and the four-day schedule, you can see their eyes light up a bit and perhaps they're thinking about, Ooh, what would I do with a four-day schedule?

So it's been overwhelmingly positive. People usually talk about what they would do with that extra day. Would it be spend more time with family? Would it be just resting and relaxing? I haven't heard anything bad from the staff that have the four-day workweek, that they don't like it.

Karina: Is there an option to not participate in that? If somebody wanted to work more hours is there flexibility to do that as well?.

Jessie: So during the cut, trim and blow season, we stick with the four-days for that. But for employees that are interested in more hours, we do help out other divisions. We have one-off projects. So there's usually work for those who want to make the extra hours. So it's nice having that flexibility of maybe you want to make a little bit of extra money for going on a trip or something.

Our staff lets management know or if we're busy we ask staff and some will volunteer to put in the extra hours or some will ask for the extra hours. So it is really nice having that flexibility so that if they want more hours, they're generally available to them.

Karina: And have clients noticed any change in operations or services? Is it even on their radar or have you gotten any feedback about that?

Jessie: Yeah, generally we're usually on a weekly or biweekly schedule. So with the field service teams, they're usually coming on the same day that the client expects. But it's even an advantage of if it is a rainy day, we can still generally fit all the work in that week. So it's not like we have our staff scrambling on the weekend to try and complete the schedule. We've got that nice buffer so that clients can consistently have their properties maintained on a weekly or biweekly basis.

Karina: And would it be safe to assume that those employees who are enjoying the four-day workweek are maybe a little bit happier and have the energy to put in a little bit of extra effort? And that's reflected in the services that they provide those clients?

Jessie: Absolutely. Tying back to our frequent surveys, we monitor things like happiness and motivation and relationships. And consistently our scores are pretty high in those departments. That impact of having that extra free time and even it's just to get a better night's sleep or feel rested, having the space away from work to recharge and do things that you're passionate about. Employees are certainly a lot happier in just having that extra time to themselves.

Karina: I'm going to want to dive into that a little bit more in just a few minutes about the passion and the time for other projects. But when this conversation about the four-day workweek comes up in different places, a common concern is that there's a potential impact on productivity. How does Dicam management measure productivity since the transition and have you noticed any changes?

Jessie: We estimate our hours thoughtfully and we ensure that workloads on staff are not unsustainable so they have the energy to work efficiently. It really helps that part of the retention is we have a lot of our lawn maintenance staff that keeps coming back season after season. So they've got the experience, they know the routes, they know the clients.

So having all that background knowledge before the season begins really helps with their they're productive right out the gate. They know our expectations. They know what the clients are looking for.

And we also have support staff that assist with things like client care, equipment, maintenance and a dedicated supervisor so crews can focus on getting their properties completed. They just have to focus on doing a good job in the field. We've got others that if they encounter problems, there's going to be someone there to support them. And that's once again, tying back to our Serve value. We try to serve each other as much as possible internally. So having

that good support system is a good foundation for having a bit more flexibility around scheduling and being able to be a little bit more creative with it.

And also operationally, having a four-day schedule has resulted in less start up time, less shutdown time, less windshield time. There's not that extra day where crews are at the shop getting loaded up, driving around, coming back to the shop, unloading. It's for maintenance of equipment. We have that extra day that a piece of equipment breaks down, we could focus on fixing that on the day off so that when they come back to start their next week, the equipment's ready to go. So you don't really have to lose the productivity behind having equipment down.

It gives management an opportunity to work on the business as opposed to working in the business because there's that day where they're not going out. So management can more carefully review anything operationally and make the changes necessary. It also gives us more training time as well. Sometimes we use that extra day to do training for staff so that they can hit the ground running faster, better orientations, better onboarding.

And even with one-off projects, that extra day actually gives us the opportunity, going back to if staff want more hours, we can take on projects that maybe are a day long because now we have staff available, they want to make extra hours. We can do that project. So in terms of productivity, not only does it directly impact the staff out in the field, but it gives staff supporting the operations the ability to almost slow down and thoughtfully think about how we can make things better because we have that opportunity. We're not potentially in the weeds trying to trying to fix things. There's a bit of calm so we can focus on how do we do things better.

Karina: You've just listed so many benefits for implementing a four-day workweek. Why do you suppose some companies would resist the idea after hearing that there's so much more space and time for maintenance and training and onboarding and thoughtful planning? Why do you suppose this hasn't become more popular already?

Jessie: Change is really hard, right? It's really hard. If this is the way you've done it every single green season, and it's a big change, too, you really have to think about so many different aspects of how you approach the work, how it gets scheduled. It can certainly feel like such a big undertaking and you might not know where to begin with it.

So I think it's a little bit of a fear of the unknown. What if we try this and it doesn't work out? And I think there's still a bit of stigma around it as well, where if people are working one day less are they viewed as not as productive or a little bit more lazy.

It's going to take some time for some people to get on board with something like this. I can think of tech companies and maybe more digital companies that have implemented this, but I honestly can't think of any other construction or landscaping or more field kind of roles that I've attempted to do something like this.

So yeah, business leaders might not see any other companies doing something like this in their industry. So they might automatically just assume that it doesn't work. Right?

Karina: That's an interesting point because what it's really done is set Dicam apart. It's a, it's a differentiator to take you in this big pool of potential companies to choose from or to work for, and you have something that sets you apart and that's quite different and it is working for you. So let's talk about that as a retention and recruitment tool for finding great employees.

What's your turnover like and how's it been to find employees during this labour shortage?

Jessie: I will say when I joined the company, I thought recruitment was going to be one of the biggest challenges. Everywhere that I've been, in HR. Different industries, it's the biggest challenge. It hasn't been perfect, but it's felt easier than what I expected. And I think having the four-day workweek that's been, it's not a perk that solves everything, but I think it's a good component of it because, like I mentioned before, any time that I mentioned to a candidate that this is something we have, their eyes light up, that they're already getting the ideas of what their life would look like with a four-day workweek. And that's exactly what went through my head when I interviewed with Dicam and found out that they do four-day workweeks.

So, as you said, it's a differentiator. Maybe people have only heard about it through news articles or something like that. Or maybe someone in a different industry that got to try it out. As a retention tool, once again, we have experienced crew leaders and crew members. They keep coming back season after season because they do really appreciate that work-life balance once again as a component of it.

I think our culture is really strong and we continually invest in our employees. So all the other things that we do to support a strong culture, I think really is what keeps them in. But this is just the cherry on top for them.

Karina: Now, you hinted at this being something that really appealed to you when you were being hired and you are an H.R. manager for Dicam. And I think there's a lot of companies out there where the employees of a landscaping company aren't necessarily the ones doing the

landscaping, but they're the support staff doing things like accounting, bookkeeping, scheduling, H.R. There are all these different kinds of positions that are within the trades and the industries that maybe people don't necessarily think about. But now here you are in this position at a landscaping company, you get the option to participate in a four-day workweek. And how did that change things for you personally?

Jessie: It was life-changing, to put it simply. When I was interviewing, I had a couple of offers on the table. Dicam was one. I had another company with an offer as well, and I had no doubt that I wanted to go with Dicam because I could really see, and once again, the four-day workweek was a big factor, but I really saw the culture that they were able to display in the interview. So that was also a really big, big thing because you could have this nice perk of a four-day workweek but if it's a really difficult workplace culture, having that extra day off isn't going to solve the negative feelings you might have with working in an environment that you don't enjoy.

So, I joined Dicam. Right away fell in love with having that extra day off. I'm a musician and I play bass guitar in a few different bands. So a lot of my Friday and Saturday nights and even Thursday nights I'm out, playing music with my bands. I also do concert photography.

So whether I'm on stage or off stage, I'm usually out those nights enjoying the music scene. But last year I had the opportunity to tour with a musician in the United States. I've never done anything like this before. It was one of the things on my bucket list to go on tour and having the four-day workweek really enabled me to do that.

The shows and festivals were all on weekends. We would leave on a Friday, come back on the Sunday. I didn't miss any work as a result, so I was still able to keep my work obligations in check, but I was also able to live my dream. So it's really hard to describe, but it's just absolutely amazing.

Karina: Now, for our listeners who don't have the benefit of seeing your face right now, you are beaming and the smile is so big because this opportunity has delighted you so much. And I think that's really exciting that for an employer to be able to give that space to their staff to pursue those interests who will then come back and work diligently with dedication and hopefully joy and also having fostered all these other interests that have a way of improving your creativity and your problem solving skills and your relationship building skills, all these wonderful things that transfer over into the work of being a landscape company. Hopefully other people get that same opportunity because just listening and seeing you talk about it is really inspiring.

Jessie: Absolutely. And just to add to that, sometimes I take on extra work as well. The company gives me so much, whenever they need me for a little bit of extra stuff, without hesitation, I'm there for them.

Sometimes I work up that day because it's a busy hiring season, they're busy getting ready for season changeovers. And I have absolutely no problem with delivering right back to the company. So I think that extends into other divisions as well, where our employees do so much for us. They put a lot of time and effort into helping the company succeed. They serve us really well and we want to serve them really well back.

So being able to do anything that can help them grow professionally, but also just grow in their lives as well.

I always get really excited when employees tell us they they just bought their first house, they're getting married, they have their first baby and being able to have a workspace that they they can tend to their needs at home, and still have a great work-life balance. I think that's one of my favorite things about being in H.R. is hearing the success stories of our employees within the business, but also within their personal lives as well.

Karina: That's a really human touch that I just love that you guys are implementing. That's really exciting. Lastly, from your perspective as an H.R. professional, what advice would you offer other companies considering this? When is a good time to explore this option?

Jessie: I think something like this really takes a lot of thought and planning. And I think the first step is establishing that strong culture. You might have to do a little bit of background work to make sure your employees are satisfied, they're committed to your company values and your goals, and then you can branch out and continue to offer perks and initiatives that enhance the employee experience.

And I think whether it's a four-day workweek or not, being able to do what the management team did, do a pros and cons list, really think about what good would this do for the business? What challenges might we encounter? You can't predict everything. You can't have every single benefit and downfall of an initiative, but putting that initial thought into thinking about how this will work for the business can really help business leaders envision how this could begin to unfold in the company.

I think serving the employees is really important as well. If all our staff said, no, we don't want a four-day workweek, we're not going to force something like that upon them. So, it's really important to listen to your staff and see if this is something that they want? The majority of them, maybe the priority in their lives is working as many hours as possible to meet financial goals. So knowing what your employees would benefit from it and what they want would be an important step as well.

And then piloting a trial. You don't have to go in 100 per cent. Maybe just for a summer. You try out a four-day schedule or every other week. You have to get creative with it, but you have to think about how the scheduling would work around that as well and set clear expectations, communicate with your staff.

Here's the pilot program, here's what we expect from you. Here's the ground rules for it to really help them understand and succeed in what you're trying to accomplish. Give the pilot a go and then ask your teams how do they feel about it afterwards? Ask the field staff, did they enjoy it? What were the challenges? Ask any operational staff what was beneficial for them, where was the challenge? So a lot of it is communicating with each other. There's going to be hurdles. If one thing goes wrong that doesn't mean the whole thing goes wrong. Being open minded and being able to pivot and just assessing the program before, during and after to see if this is something that can be extended to further seasons or or try a new way to to be able to implement something a little more flexible.

Karina: That's all great advice. And I hope that our listeners have the chance to reflect on that and consider implementing it in their own places of work. But Jessie, thank you so much for being such a great ambassador of this initiative and of Dicam, and I'm so delighted we had a chance to talk today about this really fascinating benefit that as part of a bigger, broader company culture can be a really great thing. So thanks so much for sharing your insights.

Jessie: Absolutely. It was my pleasure, Karina. Thank you so much for having me.

Music transition

EXTRO:

Karina: I hope you enjoyed that conversation with Jessie Taynton from Dicam Landscaping. If you feel inspired to try the four-day workweek at your company, let me know. I'd love to hear from you.

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

Thanks 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

[Dicam Landscaping](#)

[Bankrate Study: Younger workers want a 4-day workweek](#)