Things I’ve learned to improve success and profits:

- **Passionately love what you do!** (It shows, and it’s contagious!)
- **Focus on your clients, not your profits.**
  - When you help a client solve a problem, the profits will come.
  - Listen intently. Take notes on the conversation. Follow up the meeting with notes in writing. Make sure you and the customer agree.
  - Put yourself in the customer’s shoes and you will ALWAYS make the right decisions
  - Understand your client’s expectations for a job well done and execute! Sometimes we spin our wheels on details that are unimportant to the customer.
  - Realize that mistakes are often opportunities to show a customer just how good you really are. Sales recovery can sometimes have a greater impact on your reputation than just a nice job.
  - Suggested reading: Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Service by Performance Research Associates
    Knock Your Socks Off Service Recovery by Ron Zemke and Chip R. Bell
- **Know your costs**
  - Base your prices on your costs, not on your competition’s numbers
  - Remember the overhead costs have to be covered! (Trucks, gas, lease, office personnel, insurance, electric bill, etc.)
  - Consider hiring a consultant to help you set this up.
  - UGA has resources for pricing landscape services. Check out this link: [http://www.hort.uga.edu/extension/programs/CEJBW/index.html](http://www.hort.uga.edu/extension/programs/CEJBW/index.html)
- **You are valuable, too!**
  - Biggest mistake new owners make: undervaluing themselves
  - Profits look great when you’re an owner/operator. How will they look when field staff is added?
- **No entrepreneur is an island**
  - Get involved
    - Urban Ag Council, Georgia Green Industry Association, GCLP
    - Local Chambers
    - Webinars/Seminars/Trade Shows
    - Peer Groups
    - Community projects
  - Read! A good place to start: The E-Myth Revisited by Michael Gerber
  - You can’t do it all – ask for help. Associate with experts in your areas of weakness.
    - CPAs, banks, bookkeeping, attorneys, paperwork/filing, proposal generation, sales, pricing, design, etc.
    - Consider subcontracting some elements of jobs that are time-consuming or beyond your expertise. If an industry professional were doing this job, how could you and your staff make money elsewhere?
• Remember opportunity costs. Spend your time where it will make you money.

• Develop a business plan
  o Include structure, budgets, sales plan, human resources, banking relationships, accountability, training, and systems
  o Don’t fall in love with your plans
  o Goal setting is great, but be flexible. Be ready for the unexpected.

• Be honest
  o Can’t always meet those 30-day terms? You’re not alone. Talk to your vendors and give them a realistic repayment schedule. Answer the phone. Tell the truth. More likely than not, they’ll work with you when you’re up front with them.
  o Sell your expertise. Call in an expert when it’s over your head. Clients love honesty!
  o Keep your promises. ALWAYS.

• Budget and follow it
  o Don’t know how? Hire a consultant to help.
  o Gauge yourself against your budget regularly.
  o Understand how a budget works. If you haven’t met your sales goal, you will need to adjust your expenses proportionately.
  o Reforecast as needed, even if it’s mid-term

• Minimize Debts – don’t let your acquisitions outpace your sales

• Contracts!
  o Hire an attorney to write your basic contract.
  o Get a contract signed for every job, every time.

• Stay in touch with colleagues

• Keep learning, keep improving