

Ground Worker's Guidebook

HOW TO BECOME AN EXCELLENT GROUNDMAN

1) Timeliness and Preparation

- Show up for work on time, rested, and sober.
- Be reliable. If you cannot make it to work, call in as soon as possible. Don't leave a crew shorthanded without advanced notice.
- Pack a lunch and be prepared for work.
- Maintain good personal hygiene -- you're going to sweat, so use deodorant.
- Eat a good breakfast and try to take care of your 'morning business' before you get to work.
- Bring what you need; don't rely on stopping at a store en route to the job.

2) Financial Dependability

- Do not ask for an advance in pay except for an emergency.
- Learn to budget your money. Do not burden your employer with helping you out every week.

3) Vehicle Operation

- You must have a valid driver's license, and in most states it needs to be a commercial driver's license.
- You must have reliable transportation to/from work every day.

4) Work Vehicle Preparation

- Before you get in the truck, check all fluid levels, and service as needed.
- Walk around the truck and perform a visual inspection.
- Make sure all the gear that is required is on the vehicle. Ensure that all ladders, pole saws, and power pruners are tied down and that all bin doors are secured.
- Double-check all hitches and electrical connections if towing equipment.
- Make sure the truck is fueled and that you have plenty of gas, and oil. Keep a siphon hose for emergencies.
- Have a pair of old jeans behind the seat for when some unlucky soul gets a gas/oil soaking from an improperly-seated cap.
- Ensure there is an up-to-date first-aid kit and all the crew knows its location.
- Keep a couple cans of wasp spray behind the seat.
- Keep current maps in the glove box and know how to use them.
- Ensure that all traffic cones/flags/markers are available, along with all the required PPE for the entire crew.
- Whenever possible, have a cell phone for emergencies.

5) Saw Preparation

- Fuel and oil all the saws and clean the air filters before leaving the shop.
- Never send a saw up to a climber without it having been serviced and warmed up. Ensure the chain has the proper tension and is not on backwards. Double check.
- Learn how to file a chain, and be able to replace a chain in a timely manner.

6) Attitude

- Don't be one of those "It's not my job" type of workers. Superior crew members are able to work at any station.
- Assess the situation and determine a work plan.
- Keep a positive, motivated work ethic. Don't whine and complain about every little thing.
- Wear all the required PPE at all times.
- Hustle when you move; walk one way and run the other. Hurry up safely every chance you get. Do whatever you can do to expedite the completion of the job in a safe and timely manner.
- Learn how to operate a power pruner and a pole saw. Use the latter to pull out hangers and steer roped limbs. When cutting with these tools, use care to make a proper cut.
- Don't sleep on the ride while a passenger in a work vehicle. Pay attention where you are going -- you might be required to remember it later.

7) Traffic Safety

- Always have a spotter when backing up a vehicle. If someone runs over, or into, something because they are daydreaming, guess whose fault it really is?
- Beware of eaves and wires, and watch for unseen septic tanks.
- Do not get the truck stuck. Know when to pad in and do it.
- Whenever possible discuss with the other drivers the best placement of your vehicles before arriving at the job site.
- Call the customers before the crew arrives so that they can move their vehicles.
- When working on a roadside, be sure to properly position traffic cones and all markers.
- Determine if a traffic flagger is needed for busier roadways. The flagger needs to take the job seriously; stay on guard; not cause an accident; and watch for careless drivers.

8) Equipment Care

- Never leave gear anywhere it could be damaged. Set the gear next to another tree,

- a building, or an otherwise safe place. REMEMBER where you set your gear down. It's best to keep it all in one place.
- Never park any vehicles anywhere they can be struck by falling limbs.
 - If you're in a place where gear can be stolen, keep an eye on it at all times. Lock the vehicle's side bins. Never leave a side bin open, especially on the passenger's side of the truck.
 - Store the climbing gear away from the saws, gas, and oil.
 - Make sure spurs have gaff guards affixed, and that all saws have scabbards.

9) Damaged Equipment

- Report any damaged or malfunctioning gear to your supervisor as soon as you discover it.
- Treat equipment as if it were your own. The fewer expenses a business incurs (most often) translates into more money for you in the long run. Realize this.

10) Equipment Operation

- You should know how to work safely with a chipper. Never push brush into the feed chute with your hands or feet, use some type of brush paddle instead. Do not use a rake.
- You will need to learn how to operate a stump grinder.
- An experienced crew member should work shoulder-to-shoulder with a new worker, ensuring proper training in all aspects of safe, efficient equipment operation.
- You should learn to do minor maintenance as well as emergency procedures, such as unclogging a chipper chute, or better yet, how to never clog it in the first place.
- When chipping stringy or wet brush pay attention to the chipper's progress. Listen for the engine bogging down or the lack of chips being expelled from the chute; maintain a happy medium.
- Don't let the chipper run full speed all day. When a break in the chipping occurs, idle it down or shut it off completely.
- Aim the chute to fill one side of the bed, then the other, then the middle. Make sure the chute is aimed so flying chips aren't sent into traffic.
- Do not let diesel engines run out of fuel.

11) Rope Management

- You should be able to handle all aspects of ground rope operation, from securing the friction hitch, to setting the speed line.
- If you hank the ropes learn how to do it correctly.
- Do not step on the ropes or allow them to be driven upon by a vehicle.

- Do not just throw the rope on the ground, tie it to the climber's line, and then walk away. Take the time to un-hank the rope and tie THAT end to the line.
- Do not stand there and hold the rope. Step back and make sure the line goes up the tree unhindered.
- After the climber has untied the rope, ask if they want the belly pulled out, and if so do it in a smooth and careful manner. Watch for snags that may hang it up.

12) Emergency Response

- In the event of an emergency, get the first-aid kit immediately. Call 911 if needed, and know your location.

13) Productivity

- If you notice everyone around you is working and you're not, you're doing something wrong. Look around and ask yourself, "What can I do to help complete this job?" If you really need instruction about that, ask your foreman.

14) Appropriate Behavior/Dress

- Be friendly and courteous with the customer and your fellow crew members.
- Be motivated and a self-starter. Set the pace for others to follow.
- Impress the customer!
- Dress and act professionally. You are representing the company that signs your paycheck. When your clothes wear out, stop wearing them. Do not wear sneakers or open-toed shoes. Steel-toed boots are best for groundwork.

15) Communication

- Learn how to communicate with your fellow crew members without always having to hear. Use hand signals, lip reading, and simple common sense.
- Learn how to 'read' the situation-at-hand, and react accordingly.

16) Basic Rope Skills

- At the very least, learn how to tie a bowline and a clove hitch. Take a short piece of scrap rope home and PRACTICE. Knots are used extensively in this business. You will be expected to learn more as you gain experience.

17) Respect

- Be respectful of the customer's property. Treat the customer's lawn, landscaping, and ornamental items with TLC.

- Leave the property cleaner than when you arrived. Don't throw cigarette butts on the ground.
- Be respectful when talking around them. No foul language.

18) Site Management

- Keep all tools and gear in their proper place, and ensure that everyone knows what goes where.
- If you take a tool, make sure it gets returned.
- Before leaving the job site, take the time to count your saws and other gear, and make sure everything is back on the truck in its proper place.
- Keep the truck doors closed and the windows rolled up.
- Pay attention to incoming bad weather. When you see those storm clouds approaching, start rounding up and stashing the gear BEFORE the bottom falls out.

19) Tool Refueling

- Always put the gas and oil caps on tight.
- Do not stab the caps with the saw tool; angle it a bit and tighten.
- Learn how to operate the new tool-less Stihl caps.
- Put the premix in the gas tank and the bar oil in the oil tank -- don't mix them up.
- Fuel the saws in an appropriate place -- don't kill the grass or stain the sidewalk.
- Take the time to clean the filter, and to check the chain tension.

20) Crew Interaction

- More experienced crew members should keep a watch on the newer ones and help train them.
- "Newbies" need to listen and learn. The more you learn, and the quicker you learn it, the better your chances for advancement will be.
- A mutual respect must be developed between the climber and the ground crew. This is what defines a "well-oiled" team; the kind of crew where no words need spoken.
- Get in, collect the check, and get out. "Thank you, call us again please."

21) Direction

- Listen to the climber and follow their direction.
- If you are not clear on something, do not proceed until you have a clear understanding. If you must shut down the chipper and remove your ear plugs to hear, then do it. Such problems may be minimized if you first have a pre-climb talk with the climber.

- Plan your work, and then work your plan.

22) Awareness

- Always keep the climber's rope within vision.
- Look for "bellies", tangles, and hang-ups. Do not pull out a belly without asking; but do ask.
- Don't jerk on the rope and throw the climber off-balance.
- Do not pull out a hanger if the climber is still on the limb.

23) Zone Responsibility

- Always be in command of the kill zone. The climber cannot do this; it is up to you.
- No one is to breach this area.
- Always keep your eye on the climber when you enter the kill zone.
- Listen for telltale sounds.
- When necessary, cone and tape off the area.
- Look for water meters and hidden sprinkler heads.
- Move whatever you must to prevent damage from the activities. Learn how to drop cable and telephone lines, and consult with the customer before doing it.

24) Cleanup Preparation

- Clear the drag path before you start dragging. Move anything that might be damaged by the brush.
- Don't leave any gear in the kill zone or the drag path.
- Do not try to drag a large limb through a narrow gate, trim it to fit.

25) Cleanup

- When raking, start at the outermost perimeter, and work in an ever-diminishing circle toward the chipper.
- Do not make little piles of brush or rakings; employ advanced raking techniques.
- Don't bend over and pick up small debris with your hands. Use a rake.
- Do not break the rake handle; either use your boots to advance larger piles toward the chipper, or place the brush on a tarp.
- Don't leave rakes lying on the ground to be stepped on. Prop them up against something.
- Do not rake an area under a roof that still has to be blown off. Strive to rake only once.
- When stacking brush make the stack as high as possible before you start to make it wider. The neater you stack it, the easier it will be to deal with later.

- Face butts the same direction.
- When dragging brush, never drag just one limb, unless it's a big one. Find a cradle limb, neatly stack the brush atop, and drag that. Take advantage of the cradle limb for rakings as well.
- Learn how to operate a blower in an efficient manner, and know when to use it.
- If you use wheelbarrows, know when to use them and also know when to leave them on the truck.
- Don't chip rakings that may contain rocks. Respect the chipper blades. You'll be glad you did.

26) Chainsaw Procedure

- You should become expert in safe chainsaw operation and in limbing and bucking procedures.
- Use both hands to hold the saw and be alert for kickback hazards.
- Keep the saw out of the dirt.
- Learn how to file, and perform minor, in-the-field repair on your equipment. Do not operate a dull saw. Get it sharpened.
- Be familiar with using wedges and log rollers.
- Limb the tree from the trunk forward before you cut the log.
- Whenever possible, cut the limbs flush with the trunk; don't leave stubs.
- Don't cut the limbs that are holding up the limb until the brush is removed from underneath it.
- Before you make a cut that will shift the log, ensure it is safe to do so.
- Place smaller lengths of logs under the trunk to aid in cutting it.
- Do not pinch the saw. Learn the mechanics of compression and tension, and how to react to them.

27) Chainsaw Transport

- When sending a saw up to a climber set the saw on the ground and grab a generous bight of rope. Do not use the tail unless asked to do so. Pass the bight through the rear handle (the one with the trigger), and tie two simple overhand knots, leaving at least 12 inches of tail hanging.
- Never tie the climber's rope to the wrap-around handle or the chain brake. The idea is to keep the saw as vertical as possible to eliminate hang-ups. The only exception to this is when you are sending a saw AND a bull rope. Tie the bull rope to the wrap handle, and the climber's rope to the rear handle.
- Watch for hang-ups as the rope is pulled.
- Don't walk away until the climber has the saw/rope untied, and keep the ropes close to the base of the tree.

28) Lowering Material

- When roping, maintain constant visual contact with the climber and the limb being roped.
- Anytime you are under the climber, you are in the kill zone. Stay clear of the bite and swing of the roped limb.
- Listen to the climber's direction whether to let it run, hold tight, or work it for a hinge. Look at what the climber is doing and react accordingly.
- Do not take a wrap around anything except the tree the climber is in unless otherwise asked to do so.
- If you have a friction device, use it.
- Do not wrap the rope around your body or hand.
- Learn to judge limb weight and how many, if any, wraps to apply.
- Wear gloves whenever you are roping anything.
- When the climber asks to let it run, do not take too many wraps when you do it. This is an extremely important point as to the climber's safety, as well as your own.
- Observe the climber, and determine if he or she needs the bull rope back immediately. If not, resume ground duties, while also maintaining visual and/or aural contact. If the climber does need the rope, position yourself directly under the climber. Snap the rope in a straight line and let go. Do not whirl it in a circle.

29) Lowering Material Using a Pulley

- When using a pulley, be aware that the friction is much different. You will need an additional wrap on the friction device.
- Additionally, the bull rope can slide up and slip out of the pulley in a second. After QUICKLY untying the roped limb, keep the rope in your hand, or secure it to something until the climber asks for it. At the very least, tie a stopper knot on the end.

30) Material Control

- As smoothly and quickly as possible, get the roped limb to the ground; without burning the rope.
- Do not hold it and let it swing unless told to do so.
- Unless instructed to do otherwise, always let the rope down a few feet to help the hinge work and not hit the climber on the return swing.
- Learn how to work the hinge, and DO NOT STRIKE the climber with the limb.
- Watch for eaves, wires or landscaping.
- Keep overhead cutting to a minimum, and use the smallest saw to do it, preferably a power pruner.
- Face the butt toward the drag path.

- In a two person ground crew, the chainsaw operator is not responsible for untying the rope.
- Use tag lines or pole saws to guide the limb to the ground.
- Keep the kill zone clear of debris, especially when bombing down chunks.
- If the climber is not allowing you to keep up he or she needs to be told to take a break. Conversely, do not make the climber wait unnecessarily on the ground crew. Work together as a team at all times.

31) Final Note

As you progress in this field you will be required to have at least a basic understanding of tree anatomy, physiology and identification. This may be accomplished through on-the-job training, along with additional reading and various seminars available. Companies that also do landscaping will require a basic knowledge of proper pruning, planting and fertilization, along with the ability to use the tools required.