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The Impacts of This Year's Flu

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If you have a pulse, you've probably heard that the 2017-18 flu season has all the makings of a record-breaking year. The flu is definitely affecting business operations. For example, a buddy who runs a landscape contracting firm in New York had three of his five snow plow guys down for a week. That's a lot of lost revenue, and in one case, cost the business a contract. Another friend who manages a nursery lost her entire grafting crew (five employees) for a week, putting them in a significant bind in the prime winter grafting season.

All told, I spoke to 13 industry members and 11 of 13 indicated that the flu had struck their operations, with multiple employees out for four to eight days. Even worse, many employees have had to take time off due to children having the bug, exacerbating the problem.

But what can you do to lessen the effects that flu (or other illness) has on your business productivity? I decided to ask a few university business school contacts who specialize in personnel issues and it seems there are two common solutions. The first is cross-training, whereby capable employees are trained to do tasks outside their "normal" duties (for example, driving a plow-truck). The second is biting the bullet and going to a temp agency. Now will either of these work for something like grafting, which is as much an art as it is a science? Nope. And will a cross-trained employee be as efficient as someone who does the task regularly? Nope. But it will at least keep the wheels turning.

And finally, my Registered Nurse mother would want you to know that the majority of flu spread occurs the day before symptoms begin and for up to four days after fever breaks and the general feeling of death subsides. That latter period, when an employee returns to work, is when a lot of spread occurs. So you may want to give folks a few extra days to recuperate before returning to active duty. Keep all this in mind for the potential second wave of flu, which can happen in April and even May, depending on the severity of the flu season. **GP**