Integrity has been defined as doing the right thing even if nobody is looking. As professionals, we often have the opportunity to make the quick buck, but in doing so, we undermine the integrity of the profession. Let me give you an example. A customer asks to have bagworms sprayed in June. The junipers are the only ones affected. Here is an opportunity; you are at their home anyway and could save a trip later, so you suggest to do a blanket spraying of all the shrubs and trees whether they have insects on them, or not. Is this good business or a disservice to the customer, the profession, and the environment?

By applying blanket, catch-all applications, regardless of insect type, life cycle, and timeliness, the value of the profession has been diminished by disregard of the expertise that should have been used to do a more effective and safe job of insect control. Blanket application is a misuse of chemicals. The insect has not been targeted, isolated to the infected area, or the minimal chemical applied at the most effective time to control the insect population.

So why are these blanket programs being used by the industry? Why do we continually shoot our industry in the foot for temporary quick buck results? Why do we allow our professionalism and expertise to be dictated by chemical company programs? Why don’t we sell contracts for services as needed, rather than whenever for whatever the program calls for. Lack of skills, professionalism, and integrity for doing lawn and landscape maintenance may be a big part of the problem.

Whenever an industry experiences rapid growth, new businesses pop up to reap the opportunity. Many of these new entrants are not trained and do not have the expertise they need. Competitive external forces often cause a business to grow faster than the internal structure of the organization can handle. The result is that there is lack of attention to details and the goal becomes to complete the largest number of jobs possible in a given time restraint. The quality of service suffers.

The industry is fragmented at best. There are many companies, all with their own policies, a wide range of standards, and a wide range of competencies. The homeowner has very little input and has expectations based mostly on the number of times they see you and the price they pay for whatever it is you do.

There is concern within the industry, mostly from established firms. They are trying to do the best job possible, while fighting the growing mindset of blanket programs for lawn care and insect control. Doing maintenance correctly can be profitable and safer if we educate the industry and customer on a proper standard of care.

It is important for the profitability and sustainability of the profession, along with the integrity of the industry, that we participate in educational programs, join associations that promote the entire horticulture profession, and take a good look at the way we do business within our communities. We are becoming more of an information society, and the company with the best information will have the competitive advantage. Seek out reliable information. Learn all you can. Discontinue blanket chemical programs for the good of the customer, the environment, and the professional integrity of the industry.

Emily Nolting, Ph.D., Commercial Horticulture Specialist, K-State Research and Extension