



Thomas Crummy established Thomas J Crummy Landscaping in Cloonloo, Co Sligo, in 1998. The company employs four people, including three landscape operatives, and has a separate sports ground maintenance division, Thomas J Crummy Sports Turf Management.

Why did you set up your business?

I recognised that there was a need in the Irish market for quality, reliable and professional landscaping services. I come from a family of self-starters, so it seemed natural to set up my own business.

How did you fund the business initially?

Personal savings. Sligo County Enterprise Board were, and still are, a fantastic help. I had a great bank manager, Joe Flannery, from AIB in Boyle. After hearing about my plans he sanctioned a loan for €5,000, which provided much-needed working capital.

What was the best advice you got?

The best advice I received when starting out was from my father, John Crummy, who told me "to remain vigilant and not to become complacent". He also said that the best motivator is the "hunger and drive for success". This advice kept me focused on building the business, and through the recession. It helped me to focus, not just on survival, but on growing the business – hence the introduction of our sports turf division in 2008.

How I got started

Lessons in Entrepreneurship

What was the most important lesson you learned starting out?

I had only been established for a very short time when a client approached me to design a very ambitious landscaping project. It was a nature trail through a farm and garden design around the dwelling house. Naturally, I was eager to do the work and gave them a very competitive quote, which was they accepted. They gave me the go-ahead to proceed with the work, and after spending over a week in the office on the design, I presented the drawing to the client. That



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was the last I saw of the drawing or the client. Failure to agree the terms and conditions prior to commencing the design stage cost the business €1,500.

In retrospect, I believe this was the best lesson I received in business management. Since then, all of my quotations are in writing and agreed with the client, which has resulted in a very low level of bad debts, much lower than the norm for the landscaping sector in Ireland. It was really a lesson in attention to detail. Since that first costly mistake, I have realised that successful businesses really get the detail right in every area. My company is certi-

fied and audited annually by Certification Europe, and participates in the Bord Bia Landscape Quality Programme. It has been a Bord Bia Quality Award recipient since 2005, and two-time winner of the Bord Bia Landscape Business of the Year Award.

What was your biggest make or break moment?

It was at the beginning of the economic downturn in 2008, when I was owed a significant amount of money for my work on a large project. Having to wait almost two years for the full payment caused me significant cash-flow problems. If the paperwork had not been as robust as it was, I would not have received any of the monies owed. Strangely, surviving this period left me feeling quite empowered and energised to continue working hard to secure the business for the future.

Perseverance, hard work and having an excellent quality assurance system have helped me secure business through difficult times. Another important break was being persuaded by external advisors that developing a Quality, Health, Safety and Environment (QHSE) System would be a positive step for the business. I believe that a major factor in the success of the business comes from our QHSE system. We believe the foundation of our success lies in a commitment to understanding and meeting our clients' needs for safety, workmanship, on-time delivery and value-for-money.

If you had it to do all over again, what would you change?

I would have been more outspoken about the lack of regulation within our industry and the subsequent losses to the taxpayer. Ireland's landscaping sector in Ireland should operate more professionally. As a member of the Association of Landscape Contractors of Ireland (ALCI), I must adhere to a code of conduct. Members are open to audit at any time should there be a complaint from a member of the public. I believe that some landscapers outside the association are doing work below specification, which is short-changing the public. I am actively campaign about this issue, but I wish I had been more involved with the ALCI from an earlier stage. Had I known that recession was on the cards, I would have also introduced the Sports Turf Management Division at an earlier stage. Otherwise, I believe that our business model is sustainable and that there will always be a market for landscapers engaging in high quality work.

At what point where you sure that your business would make it past start-up stage?

I knew that I would succeed in 1999, when I was just one year in business. I won our first nationally-recognised award from the ALCI for Private Garden Design & Construction at Kieran's Pharmacy in Ballinamore, Co Leitrim. Winning such a prestigious national award at such an early stage in the life of the business gave me the confidence to go on and grow the business. In the same year, I was commissioned to design and build a Millennium Garden for the Cathedral grounds in Bal-laghaderreen, Co Roscommon.