

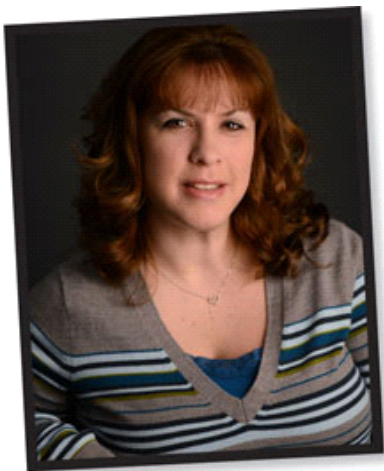
GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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We're All Affected ... and We Should All Care

Jennifer Zurko



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The first time it happened to me, I was in college. I was a sports reporter for the student newspaper and my spring beat was covering the baseball team, which not only included recapping the games, but writing pre-game stories on upcoming opponents. I would go to the field, interview the coach, the starting pitcher and a few players to get their thoughts on the other team.

On one of those days, it was lovely spring weather, and I guess I was wearing a tight, lower-cut t-shirt. While I was interviewing one of the players, he stops, points to my chest and asks, "Where have you been hiding those?" At first, I was taken aback, like, "Did I hear that right?" But I recovered quickly and asked him if he wanted me to write that he's a misogynist (fill in expletive here). That shut him up. Which also meant that the interview was over. I never spoke with him again. He was a second-stringer anyway ...

Every day when you turn on the TV, there's a smattering of breaking news on the next celebrity or politician who's been accused of sexual harassment. It's to the point that my morning ritual now includes hearing about new allegations of misconduct.

Even if you never watch the news or read a newspaper, you can't escape it on social media, either. Cable news is squeezing every ounce of their 24 hours on the topic and the pundits have been punditing about it for weeks.

The funny thing is ... this "news" isn't "new." It may seem like the floodgates have opened all of the sudden, like this is a new phenomenon. But women have been dealing with comments, looks, sneers, unwanted touching—and way worse—for decades and decades. Since forever.

And yes, I said "women." Of course, some men have been the victims of sexual harassment, but I can say with certainty that they are a minority. If you asked 100 men if they've ever been sexually harassed, a few may raise their hands. But if you ask 100 women, all of them would have their hands up high enough to raise the roof.

Just because none of us are Hollywood stars or politicians doesn't mean we have to be naive enough to think it doesn't affect all of us in some way. Every woman who works at a greenhouse, garden center, breeding company, university, production facility, etc. has experienced some form of sexual harassment. I'm not saying all of our fine green industry male colleagues are handsy, leering perverts, but all of them have a wife, girlfriend, sister, mother,

friend who's been affected—and that means they're affected, too.

This is why we chose to address it in this month's issue. We're not discussing who did what to whom—leave that to cable news. What we wanted to do was provide some information and advice to help you as business owners, managers and members of this industry to navigate this issue that's come to the forefront of all of our personal and professional discussions. We're certainly not experts, so we asked HR guru Glenna Hecht to help us out. Turn to page 46 to read her article.

A few days before we decided to make this the topic of our cover story, we got an email from friend and green industry consultant Kellee Magee-O'Reilly that included an open letter to the industry to address the issue of sexual harassment. In it, she reiterated what our editorial board had discussed the week prior—our industry is not immune. But we can change that. We can be different.

Sure, the men outnumber the women in hort, Kellee said, but that also means that us ladies have more allies—more “big brothers” and “adopted uncles” that have our backs. True, a lot of us can take care of ourselves and don't hesitate to tell a creep to back off, but there are many of us who aren't empowered, are too afraid, to stand up and say, “Hey, that's not cool.”

We should take this opportunity to support each other and try to make sure that we're all in a place where we can feel comfortable, but still maintain that friendliness that our industry is known for—during and after work. We live in a time when that's more important than ever. #metoo **GT**