

GROWERTALKS

Acres & Acres

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They'll Love Your Job

Chris Beytes



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Why did you get into this business? More importantly, what keeps you here? It's hard work, often hot and dirty, very seasonal, requires weekends (at least during spring) and tends to be feast or famine—like this season, when nobody wanted our stuff and now everybody wants our stuff. Yet here we all are, presumably enjoying, even loving, what we're doing.

Me? I got here by accident. You probably know my story by now: Journalism degree (because I don't like math), bought college girlfriend (now wife) three packs of Cocktail Begonias. She went crazy for flowers, changed her major to hort and we're both now neck-deep in the industry. Why do we stay? We love it—the plants, the people, the good we do for the world. A garden is just about the most perfect spot on earth and we're experts at making gardens happen—that's pretty cool.

For years, the industry has been asking, "How do we attract new employees to horticulture?" There are great initiatives underway as we speak, such as Seed Your Future (seedyourfuture.org). There's lots of hope that the current interest in locally grown food, in the environment, in biotechnology—even in cannabis—will attract young people to consider careers in horticulture. Those are all trendy, socially progressive ways to get them in the door, but personally, I think the more alluring and important attributes of our industry are the simple, practical ones that have kept you and me here for so long.

Reason 1: Money. They say it's hard to make good money in horticulture, but that's just not true. I know lots of folks who make \$60,000 or \$80,000 or \$100k or more a year. Granted, you won't come out of a four-year hort program and immediately command \$70,000 like a young engineer might. Nor will you earn that working for a tiny mom-and-pop business where the owner doesn't even earn that. Then again, if you work hard and are good, even with just a high-school diploma (or less!), you can wind up earning six figures-plus at a greenhouse. And there are many lucrative opportunities with our allied suppliers, like seed companies, hardgoods distributors, manufacturers ... even magazines!

Reason 2: Product. What's not to love about being surrounded every day by living, breathing, colorful, interesting, oxygen-producing plants, from ephemeral treasures to mighty redwoods, from microgreens to green roofs? I suppose there are a few unfortunate souls who are allergic to chlorophyll, but otherwise, doesn't everybody love plants?

Reason 3: People. I'll bet most of you would put "people" in the top three reasons you love this business—especially if you came here after several years in another industry. Plant people are amazing! We love to smile and laugh, even in the toughest of times, which is also when we always rise up to help one another. People crave community and the horticulture community is as good as it gets. In no other industry will you find competitors routinely breaking bread or sharing a beer.

Reason 4: Travel. Our inputs come from all around the globe, which gives many of us plenty of opportunities for accumulating frequent flier miles. If you have some language skills, you could even work abroad. I've been to more than 20 countries in my career, something that wouldn't have happened had I worked in a more boring sector of journalism. Granted, small businesses may not give employees the opportunity to see the world, but larger businesses definitely do (see "opportunity" below).

Reason 5: Opportunity. Maybe it's improved since my day, but educational institutions tend to give you a narrow view of your opportunities. I was going to be a newspaper reporter or newspaper editor. My wife was going to grow plants or retail them. We had no clue that there were thousands of possible jobs awaiting us. There's something here for every personality type. In fact, when I speak on careers at the local community college, I stress how anyone's strength or interest, from math and computers to cooking and art, can be put to use in horticulture.

These are just five things that I love about my job; I'm sure you've got your own. (Email them to me at beytes@growertalks.com and I'll share them).

So, yes, by all means, get the next generation's attention with the many socially trendy job prospects our industry offers. But win them, and keep them, with the practical matters that we all know are most important in the end. **GT**