

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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Having Six Legs at a Career Fair

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“What is the most important skill that you need for your job?” a girl asked us, paraphrasing slightly from an assignment sheet we knew all the students attending the high school career fair had to fill out.

Other questions my fellow bug-nut Riana and I had received several times were: “What was your life’s path?” and “What type of education do you need for your job?”

We were standing behind a table surrounded by plants, representing our employers at a local high school. Of course, being the two buggiest of Qualitree’s peeps, our booth featured Riana’s personal insect collection and a petri dish of *Hypoaspis miles* (*Stratiolaelaps scimitus*) under the scope for kids to check out.

High schoolers strolled by in small groups, looking slightly uninterested and yet somehow slightly interested at the same time. You could tell when someone was naturally captivated by plants. They would see the greenness from our booth, and maybe without even knowing it, they’d walk toward us. These kids usually had some knowledge and would ask good, relevant questions.

You could also tell which were not instinctively attracted to plants. Their eyes scanned the contents of our booth, and if we made eye contact, we might get a nod or a smile, but their feet would stay pointed forward.

Until they got a glimpse of Riana’s colorful, expertly pinned bugs, that is.

Then most did a 90-degree turn towards us—some even had to do a 135-degree turn. They’d glaze over what we had, keep walking and suddenly do a comical double take.

To be honest, that’s when the most interesting questions were asked. Genuine, spontaneous, fresh curiosity. They weren’t actively seeking out a position at Qualitree; they came because some butterfly or beetle made a question pop into their heads. Talk about great conversations!

Meanwhile, the girl with the skill question was still unanswered. But it wasn’t hard to respond with the smart answer I’d eavesdropped on Riana giving another student a few minutes before.

Observation skills. Everything we do as growers and as scouts requires good brain/eye coordination. Like the kids that glazed over our booth, but did a double take—their eyes had seen something different and their brains told them to investigate, noticing differences in plant growth patterns and color, small clues insects leave behind, emerging

disease problems, climate anomalies ...

It's one thing to see something interesting, but to investigate and respond is where the skill comes in.

The beauty of this answer was that it applies to every single position at an operation like Qualitree, not just growing and IPM—like noticing and investigating a small leak, so the service and maintenance guy could save hours of hassle for the shipping team a week later when things are too crazy to allow for equipment breakdowns. Detecting an inefficiency or recognizing a possible improvement to processes as a team leader or team member could save time or someone's back.

Spotting an extra 0 here and fixing some missing 00s there as a sales guy could mean the difference between a customer smiling royally and a customer royally ticked off. (Zeros are also applicable for accounts receivable, accounts payable and whoever is calculating pesticide rates).

By the time the last bell rang and there were no more kids to hassle into asking questions, I was ready to pick up my plants and find some spider mites who were definitely NOT interested in what I had to say. I did enjoy the day, though, especially when it was busy. Being able to share with kids (attentive and indifferent) what I'm really interested in was quite rewarding.

Oh, who am I kidding—the best part was it gave Riana and I a chance to bug-talk the ears off of unsuspecting victims other than our poor co-workers. **GT**

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