

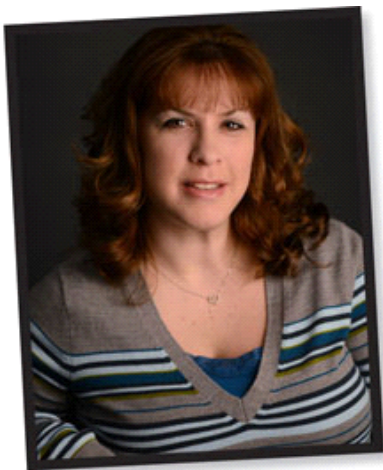
GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

12/1/2018

Super Mom, Super Wife, Super Woman

Jennifer Zurko



JENNIFER ZURKO

I had never met Maria Costa-Smith in person. We'd never really exchanged many emails, either, until recently when I approached her about being the subject of this month's cover story. If I needed some info, I would always contact her husband, Joche.

Maria was always this enigma to me; someone who I'd seen photos of and heard about, but I definitely didn't have enough information to really paint a picture of who she really is. Like the pope or the queen of England.

I was nervous about meeting her. She's co-owner of one of the largest, most successful growing businesses in our industry. I had already put her up on a high pedestal before even meeting her face-to-face.

I shouldn't have been surprised that she's a genuine, down-to-earth person. Passionate and easy to laugh, joke about herself and point out her flaws, but

proud of her strengths. Faith driven and inspiring.

I want to be like Maria Costa-Smith when I grow up.

Seriously, though, despite the fact that we have completely different roles in horticulture, her experiences and outlook on life are relatable. I kept thinking, "Oh my gosh, I know exactly how you feel."

When I asked her about how she's balanced work and motherhood, she admits to feelings of guilt. (Me, too!) As a woman in a male-dominated industry, she's had to adapt and learn to read the room and play to her strengths (sounded like my newspaper days writing in the sports section). And as a Cuban-American woman with deep roots in her Hispanic heritage, she's had to break down those cultural barriers brick-by-brick (my Mexican background has played a different role in my career, but I still understand the challenges that come with being a Latina in a man's world).

I hope I painted a portrait of Maria that does her justice with my cover story starting on page 40. Regardless of your gender or your years in this industry, I think anyone could glean some inspiration and wisdom from someone who's driven to be the best person she can be in all aspects of her life.

Also, for the fourth year in a row, we've made our December issue an homage to Fast Company and packed it with business and HR-related articles, including: planning for your successor (page 48); how to avoid getting hacked (page 52); dealing with the sensitive issue of an employee struggling with addiction (page 58); attracting workers to

your business (page 60); and the results of our 23rd annual Wage & Benefit Survey (page 64).

As poinsettia season winds down and you take a breather before the crunch of spring production, I hope this month's issue provides some tips and ideas you can put to good use. **GT**