

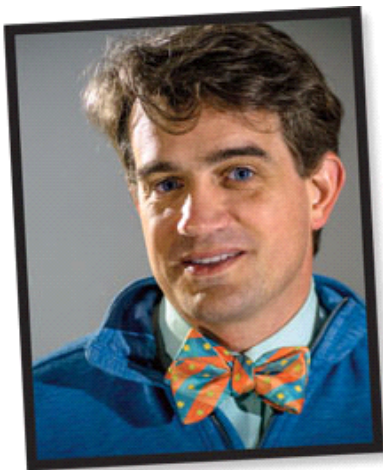
GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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What I Learned on My Summer Vacation

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"This will not be a vacation," I said and then paused, taking time to look each of my six children in the eye. "This is an adventure. You won't always be comfortable. Not every moment will be fun, but it will be a journey we will never forget."

The eight of us left our home where the Chesapeake meets the Atlantic and set out to see America in our motorhome. We made it to California. We visited many spectacular National Parks. We saw cities. We climbed mountains. We toured a few nurseries, too. Five weeks later, we returned home.

The mark of a "good" trip is that you come back a different person with a new perspective. There are things in this world that must be seen in person—experienced first hand—in order to truly learn their lessons. There is wisdom

that only comes from doing. Some knowledge is only absorbed through sweat.

Here are a few business lessons I learned on the road this summer:

1. The joy is NOT in the journey. Oh, there is joy, to be sure, in the journey, but it's not "the" joy. Everyone needs a destination. I was blessed: my kids didn't complain about driving through the desert for hours on end, but it sure helped that they knew there was something cool like the Grand Canyon to see when we finally stopped for the night. Likewise, my employees might enjoy their jobs, but it's a lot easier to feel that joy when they know where we're headed. Yes, there is joy in the journey, but only if you've picked a good destination.

2. You can't do it all. Five weeks might sound like a long time, but America is unbelievably huge. You probably think you knew that already: "I've seen a map, Art." Maybe you've driven from sea to shining sea before, but I guarantee you that the memory fades. Man, this is one vast nation we have! It would take years of constant travel to see everything worth seeing. On your journey, you'll drive past more than you'll stop and see. Forget FOMO (the fear of missing out); that's a mental disorder. Pick your destinations, but not too many. You have to decide. If you try to do everything, you won't get very far.

3. The things you don't plan for are the best things of all. We broke down (multiple times) and the things we did after those difficult setbacks were the times I enjoyed most. When my plans were ruined, things weren't falling apart; they were falling into place. My employees—like my family—look to me to see how I'll react when things don't turn out how I intended. Don't be discouraged! You'll find that when the worst things—the ones you spent so much time

worrying about—actually happen, it's not so bad as you'd imagined. So why worry? Stay positive. Make the best of it. It will be great. You'll see.

4. Have plenty of money. That last bit of advice? Well, it really only works if you've got sufficient cash to deal with the curve balls of life's journey. The RV breaks down? Put her in the shop, rent a big ol' SUV and stay in comfortable hotels for a few nights. You gotta have reserves. Maybe the destination will have to change. Maybe the way you get there will be different. But the team you're leading needs to be fed and housed and carried safely to the destination. You know your next breakdown is coming ... you just don't know when. Don't let it lead to an even worse financial devastation. In the end, we're all self-insured.

5. Make home the final tourist trap. The best souvenir you can pick up is a fresh perspective. We all spend most of our lives in our greenhouses and nurseries. We must—there's no other way to succeed in this business. But there's a costly disease we all develop: we grow blind to what's right in front of us. We don't notice the chipping paint, the faded sign, the creeping mess in the file room. Maybe you do notice those things. Good for you. But there's something—I swear it's true—that you don't see with an outsider's eye because it's so familiar.

The only cure I know is to get away for more than a few days. The key is to come back home without anything specific to do right away. Sure, you might have a lot of catching up to do, but if you've been gone for several weeks, what's one more day? Take the time to see your operation as if you were a tourist. Where do I park? Which door do I go in? Where's the bathroom? Why are they doing that job and why are they doing it that way? You'll be surprised at what you discover and it will make the trip worth every penny you spent. **GT**

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