

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Secession Planning: In Your Footsteps

Chris Beytes



Do you want your kids to follow in your footsteps? We asked that question in our email newsletter Acres Online back in March and had an overwhelming response—it's probably the most thought-provoking (and reply-inspiring) question we've ever asked.

Overwhelmingly, you say you DO want your kids following in your footsteps—76% said yes, 14% said no way, and 10% didn't care one way or another, as long as their kids are happy.

Also, many respondents said their parents advised THEM against going into the business ... yet today they're deep in the greenhouse industry and loving it.

Here's a sampling of the responses we received, both for and against. It's obvious from your emails that you all share common ground: You're all passionate about your children's happiness, and about our industry.

Robert Swanekamp, Kube Pak Corporation, Allentown, New Jersey:

The timing of your question could not be more appropriate. My son has recently come home to learn more about Kube Pak and what it could offer him as a career.

Helping out in the greenhouse as a youngster, he showed no great interest and went off to pursue other career choices. Now, as he waits to hear from some business schools, he's working in the office with his Uncle Bill and getting quite the education about our industry.

I would love for him to decide that what we do is right for him. But it's his decision. Where he ends up is still to be determined, but having him here as a mature adult with open eyes and ears is a pleasure. Here's to the next generation!

Angie Hawks, Hawk's Farm & Garden Center, North Pole, Alaska:

All three of our children are busy with school, work one to two hours a day during the school week and about three to five hours on Saturday. Our youngest is 10 today (I can't believe that) and the boys are 11 and 12. They enjoyed their first paycheck of the season last Friday and are looking forward to many more during the

season. They have many plans with the money they have yet to earn. It's such a joy to see them grow up and watch how they deal with the responsibilities that they have. My husband and I hope it will help build a strong work ethic that they will take with them in any future career choice they make.

Kim Bechtle, Still Pond Nursery, Earlville, Pennsylvania:

My kids HATE this business and have both chosen other career paths. I guess it didn't look much like fun, and they are completely aware of and resent all the time it takes to do it right. Smart kids!

Eduardo Martins, Viveiros Monterosa, Lda., Moncarapacho, Portugal:

We want for our children independence and happiness. Growing plants here, we have some profit and fun, and I believe that it will go on like that. Yes, I would like that one of my daughters come into the business.

Martina Howe, Beans & Greens, Gilford, New Hampshire:

I want my kids to learn how to grow their own food, manage their soils and be self-sufficient. Whether they incorporate this into a retail business is their own choice.

Tony Ball, Bridge Farm Nurseries, Spalding, England:

We have the same problems as you on the other side of the pond. Margins are being squeezed and we constantly moan about the way the supermarkets treat us; but hey, we're in an industry that works with nature—what can be better than that? We will never be financially rich in comparison with others, but we are rich in other ways. I guess it comes down to way of life we want: Do we want to be the 9-to-5 office worker or the 7-to-6 nursery worker?

I chose my career path in horticulture some 35 years ago and have had no regrets. My kids have followed me in the family business after attending university, so they obviously like the idea of horticulture as well!

Jeff Griff, Lowe's Greenhouses, Chagrin Falls, Ohio:

I'm afraid (and slightly ashamed) that I would have to say no. I'm a third-generation grower-retailer, my children are 12 and 14. I find the amount of knowledge needed to succeed, together with the seasonality of my business and the amount of risk involved in owning a greenhouse, make the monetary rewards far too little. Long-term questions of energy costs, changing demographics and available labor make our business model even more questionable. I grew up knowing that if I could grow a good plant and treat customers fairly I had an excellent chance of success ... today that isn't nearly enough. Tomorrow, who knows if my kids would have any chance to compete, making numbers add up. So I am happy with my work, want the best for my kids and am encouraging them to find a job that they will love ... sounds just like my folks, and look what happened to me!

Judy Mitchell, Mitchell's Nursery & Greenhouse, King, North Carolina:

Yes. Demand is increasing for the small owner. Our son has joined us and is expanding the business. It's a good business if you don't mind hard work and long hours.

Lisa Paschke, Dan and Jerry's Greenhouses, Monticello, Minnesota:

I would be honored if Riley chose this career path.

Gina Atkinson, Pine Reflections, Carnarvon, Ontario, Canada:

Absolutely yes! Where else can someone enjoy the beauty of plants and receive compliments from customers every day. We live in cottage country and most of our sales come from the travelers to this area. Plants make people happy and it's great to be part of a happy business. Having spent many years in an office I wouldn't trade this lifestyle. No comparison.

Jennifer Bouvy, Abele Greenhouse & Garden Center, Saginaw, Michigan:

I am answering this question as a kid who followed in her parents' footsteps. I always said I would never go back, but after becoming a certified public accountant and working in public accounting for five years, I missed the industry. This industry tends to be family oriented, and although that can be difficult at times it also has so many rewards. I now bring my 3-, 5- and 6-year-olds to work with me, and they are playing in the dirt as I once was.

I'm glad to have my accounting background. I learned a lot in five years from my many diverse clients, and it gave me many ideas we've implemented or plan to. Times may be challenging and changing, but I think we all need to keep the positive points of the industry in mind. There are far too many good things to let the industry die! I know I will be very proud if any of my kids decide to join me someday.

Frances A. Hopkins, Under A Foot Plant Co.

I would say a resounding YES to that question! I love what I do and feel that there's no better profession to be in. If nothing else, I hope I have nurtured green thumbs in both of them and they will be gardeners for life. Whether they land in this industry or not, I'm hopeful that they understand how important the "green" industry is to our planet.

Karen Brohl, Brohl's Flower Garden, Almont, Michigan

If any of my kids (ages 19, 17 and 15) had shown interest beyond earning a little spending money, I would have encouraged it. Although my 15-year-old daughter's aptitude tests kept saying agriculture (much to her chagrin), none have. I have an electrical engineer almost halfway through college, a pretty-sure accountant heading to college this fall, and the 15-year-old is into computer programming.

Do you think my future holds a wind-powered electrical system designed by number one, finally making money thanks to number two, and a whole range run by computer ala number three? Hmmm ...