

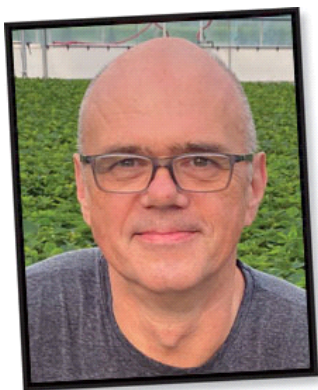
GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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The Post-Season Greenhouse Blues

Albert Grimm



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By the time you read this, the madness of spring “busy season” has come to its natural end. Steam is being released from the pressure cooker that is greenhouse shipping season. The adrenaline that kept us going for the last few months has all but evaporated. Strangely enough, chances are that it doesn't quite feel right. Or does it?

For many years, I went through a period of post-shipping funk where I no longer knew what to do with myself. Instead of feeling happy about what had been accomplished, I felt empty, almost useless. There was a genuinely anti-climactic sense of: Now what? I know that almost every grower goes through a variation of the same experience at this time of the year and it happens whether the season was success for the company or not.

If we're honest, we must admit that we enjoy the madness of spring. There's a tangible quality of happiness that comes out of the continuous barrage of problems, challenges and deadlines. When this pressure fades, our source of happiness seems to disappear along with the stress. We may have time to smell the flowers, but we miss the thrill of being challenged. It isn't boredom that bothers us, but the sudden lightness in our workdays. Whether we admit it or not, we find excitement, pleasure and gratification in the continuous mental and physical overload that engulfs us during the seasonal rush. If this wasn't so, we wouldn't put up with the pressure. Once we're back in the more monotonous humdrum of shoulder crops, we miss this unlikely source of professional bliss, and we're left feeling empty. The thrill is gone.

Mark Manson writes that “happiness is a form of action.” Happiness, he says, is an activity, not a state of being, and neither is it a destination. It's the challenges, not the routines, that add the salt and spice to our workdays. This is certainly true for me because I'm most happy at work when I deal with difficult problems that need a solution. Our production problems aren't usually pleasant in themselves, but it's the challenge of finding solutions that brings us gratification. Explore this yourself. It's not the solutions that make us happy, but the process of finding them.

There's no easy way to prevent this greenhouse post-season summer blues. The workaholics among us may try to find opportunities to keep going at full speed for the rest of the year, but that's not a solution. I know from experience that we'll crash and burn if we continue to run at full speed. The next busy season will inevitably ask from us that we once again increase our workload and ramp up our enthusiasm. This won't be possible if we're already giving 100% of our capacity during the slower months of the year.

No, we must learn to accept that the thrill and the gratification that we expect from our work comes with the same

seasonal peaks and valleys as our crop cycles. It becomes easier to adjust to the summer doldrums if we're conscious of the reason for the lack of purpose that we may feel in this comparative stillness. We may also discover an opportunity to explore and contemplate new directions for our professional passions.

We need to expand and renew our interests and capacities if we want to thrive in this industry. This is difficult to do when the pressure of peak season requires all available energy. Opportunities to meditate are important. If we don't take the time to renew and rethink our path, it can quickly turn into a rut that's difficult to escape.

These meditations take on an even grander scope when you come to my age. After more than 40 years in the greenhouse, it's inevitable that thoughts about retirement creep in. I'll happily admit that I won't complain if I no longer have to try to grow the illusive perfect poinsettia crop, but where else would I find the challenges that I know are necessary to keep me happy? If I'm no longer challenged to overcome obstacles, where will I be able to find gratification? Happiness is a form of action and I intend to continue to seek out challenges and problems that need solving. I may just like to do so with a little less intensity than what's being demanded by a greenhouse in the full swing of spring. **GT**

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