

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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Micromanage Plants, Grow People

Stephanie Saccomano



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Recently over lunch with some members of our growing team, we cringed while recounting some of our gut-churning memories: mistakes from the early days in the job. The time a few project R&D trays were forgotten in the corner of a greenhouse bay and died. That other time where a bed of trees dried out faster than expected, and they got directional sunburn and defoliated (thanks to yours truly). And that other time where ... well, you get it.

Years ago, there were many newbies on the team at once, including myself. As these kinds of mistakes came up I wondered how our then-Head Grower Gary (now CEO) was able to maintain his cool so well while continuing to coach us along. It's not like these errors were swept under the rug—the gravity of these situations were

plain and clear—but it was never a situation of finger wagging and punitive measures. It was more of a driven evaluation, a reflection of “what happened at the core of this situation to get us here and how do we prevent it in the future?”

It motivated us to do better instead of completely deflating our spirits. I imagine that for the first while of getting a new grower on track, the head grower is similar to a parent holding the handlebars of the bike while their kiddo tries not to fall over. Eventually, you step back and follow along with hovering hands to brace for any tip-overs. At some point, you let go, oversee and trust they'll know where the handbrake is, how to steer and how to ask for help when they need it. You know that they'll fall sometimes, but you also know they won't pedal into traffic.

Gary and his more experienced growers had their hands full for sure. Over time, we the handful of new growers became less nervous and more adept. We began asking even more questions and considered how we could contribute to improving growing practices. It was wonderfully collaborative. Over the years there have been many developments in the company and now my role has evolved into one of leadership. We've onboarded new team members and I, as well as those who once shared the “newbie” name tag with me years ago, get to put ourselves in Gary's shoes. What a different perspective from being the one in the seat!

I realize how challenging it is, now being that person holding the handlebars while the learner pedals. You have to maintain patience and encouragement.

I realize how stressful it can be to take that step back and follow along with bracing arms. You have to keep pace, while also anticipating and preventing big mistakes.

I realize how scary it can be to let go, oversee and allow room for mistakes. You have to build trust and rely on it,

keep a watchful eye and also be that person to lean on for help when issues do arise.

Despite the challenges/stresses/scary feelings, it's been incredibly rewarding. It's been interesting finding the balance between clear expectations while also allowing some space for one to work in their own style or try something different.

One can't possibly micromanage every person's decision-making and expect to live a long, happy life. What you can manage is clear parameters/

control points for growing that the team should be evaluating and making decisions on to stay on course for a successful crop. What you can manage is maintaining an environment where the team is eager to ask questions, or share their mistakes and the lessons learned from it.

Micromanage plants, grow people. That's one of the best lessons I learned over time from working with Gary and the company as a whole. My goal for our team is to keep that clear for any new grower who comes on board, to keep it collaborative and maintain that what can be a stressful job can also be a fun one. **GT**

Stephanie Saccomano is Indoor Spaces Lead Grower for Qualitree Propagators in Rosedale, British Columbia, Canada.