

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Train to Retain

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Technology is everywhere. It touches nearly every part of our lives and has changed how we communicate, share ideas and learn new information.

Consider just how much you rely on technology—when was the last time you watched the evening news for the weather update? What do you use to research a problem you've encountered in a recent crop? My guess would be that you didn't go to the library. Instead, you likely pulled out your smartphone and used an online search tool to quickly find the information you sought.

These are just two examples of technology's impact on our lives, but there are numerous ways technology has changed even the simplest of tasks. As we hire and train the next generation of growers, it's important to keep up with technology. Or are we waiting for the evening news to tell us what we're doing tomorrow?

Embracing the next generation

The next generation of growers probably never watched the evening news. They rely mostly on the internet to keep up with current and other newsworthy events, often watching the news happen in real time.

For this generation, there was no transition to new technology because things like the internet and smartphones have always existed in their lifetime. That's why it's important to ask ourselves how we use technology to train this new generation of growers. Should we change to match the learning style of this new generation? Possibly.

Looking back 20-plus years ago, new-hire training for horticulture was mostly hands-on, and to this day, hands-on training is often the go-to training approach in the industry. But you may miss out on helping your next hire get a great start. It's important to offer a variety of training to help them take in and retain all the new information being provided to them.

In a survey by Indeed, 39% of job seekers who left their jobs within the first six months said that more effective training could have helped them stay longer. As business owners, we often weigh the cost of a new hire. Hiring tends to happen ahead of the busy season and new hires often must hit the ground running, and proper onboarding may be missed.

The importance of onboarding

Onboarding is the period that your new hire is learning everything about your organization and the role they'll play in it. Educating new hires about the company culture is key in helping them feel part of the team. Plus you want everyone to have the same information.

A training module is an effective way to deliver this information because it takes the burden off the trainer/mentor. These modules can be provided in document form, but I encourage you to go a step further. Instead, consider creating a computer module or video to deliver the training. Remember: The next generation depends on technology and is used to having information at their fingertips, meaning the best delivery form for your training is digital.

The value of mentors

Another great training resource is your trusted employees. Including your tenured staff in the training and mentoring of new hires helps spread the training responsibilities across your team. It can also be a fantastic way to show the appreciation and trust you have in your team.

When involving your employees, it's important to communicate your expectations and processes to set your team up for success and make sure the right training is delivered. Providing a checklist of items that the mentor can share and train on is often a good place to start. The checklist also ensures that everyone receives the same training, allowing for training efficiency over time apart from handling one-off situations that come up naturally.

One-on-ones

Time will always be one of your biggest challenges, but it's important to set up short check-ins or one-on-ones with your new hire to monitor the training progress. This gives the employee dedicated time to update you on their progress and address any issues or concerns they face. I promise this dedicated time will be well received, especially if you task them with creating the agenda.

Non-traditional hire

We've all been in the situation of needing additional team members, but we're often faced with applicants who lack horticulture experience. I personally don't mind this type of candidate because it allows me to train them without the influence of previous employers or experiences. However, this level of training may be overwhelming for your team. You might need to seek out some additional ways to help train employees with little to no horticultural background.

Luckily, the pandemic forced the industry to find new ways to deliver important information and that's led to more training options that don't require you to leave your facility. Here are some recommendations to help you locate additional training resources:

- Contact local universities and ask about their training resources. Many have created great pre-recorded content in recent years.
- Look into organizations like AmericanHort, which consistently builds robust training, including pre-recorded and live training options.
- Check out Ball's Tech On Demand video series that delivers weekly cultural and technical information for your team.
- Reach out to your manufacturer reps to see if they offer any training or resources. I know the Corteva Agriscience Turf & Ornamental team holds a lot of knowledge, expertise and experience that they're passionate about sharing with their customers. Visit corteva.us/GTResources to check out our online resources.

Most importantly, make training in your facility a fun and rewarding process. And remember: Training isn't just sitting

in a classroom for a set amount of time. Many of you host daily and weekly team meetings to convey everything that's going on in your organization, but what if you invited an employee to deliver a short training session at each meeting? We do this at our monthly meetings at Corteva Agriscience with our safety moments and it's been a great way to keep safety information in mind while opening the door for important conversations.

Creating robust training for your team is a must to invest in your new hires and ensure quality. As you plan for next year, it's also a great time to review your teams' training and onboarding processes, and adjust them accordingly.

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