

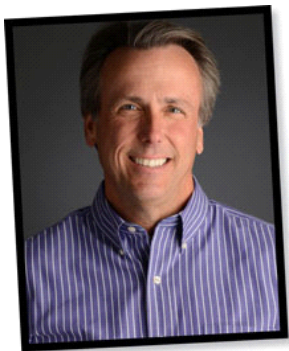
GROWERTALKS

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From the Cutting Room Floor

Chris Beytes



CHRIS BEYTES

12,565. That's how many words of notes I had from my interview with Jason vanWingerden and Frank Paul for this month's cover story. And 2,498 is how many words I was able to stuff into the pages Editor Jen Zurko allocated to me, leaving lots of good stuff on the cutting room floor. But I've got 750 more words at my disposal here, which I filled with a few more good thoughts from the guys.

GT: You two seem to have a shared vision. Where does that come from?

Jason: We're polar opposites when it comes to personalities. But I'll let Frank share that.

Frank: So where it's like CEO/COO, another way of looking at it is visionary/integrator. If you ask what the next three to five years are going to look like, Jason can paint a picture that you believe in and you see. And then I'm like, okay, I need to do this, this, this and this. And I need to put that team in place. I need to make sure we have that infrastructure ready to go. That's more my role.

Jason: And don't ask me to do that role because it will be a failure!

GT: What do the next few years look like for The Plant Company?

Jason: We've had that discussion quite a bit. Our goal is to bring on a few more growers across the country to have more diverse coverage. And we're obviously adding greenhouse space now. And so the next three to five years will probably be another doubling of the company, but then also increasing different product lines within leafjoy. Probably still within foliage, but larger pot sizes, smaller pot sizes, trying to build out that supply chain to where every year we're looking three or four years down the pipeline at what's new, what's coming. Getting more involved with the labs, the breeders and creating longer-lasting relationships with them. Actually getting involved in making that part of their process to where they want to invite us in earlier to see what they're working on and what their end goals are, so we can tell them, hey, great, as long as you're focused on the consumer, it's going to be successful. If you're just looking at whatever's going to be produced the cheapest or fastest, that probably doesn't work.

GT: What keeps each of you up at night?

Jason: I have five kids, so not much. I'm usually so tired ... (turns to Frank) What keeps us up at night?

Frank: I think ultimately having the right person in the right place. There needs to be a healthy balance between working in the business and on the business. To keep the day-to-day running, you need good people in the right

spots. Over the last three to four months, we've really elevated our hiring process, with external interviews, external assessments, multiple rounds of internal interviews, so that, both for the applicants and for us as a company, by the time we come to the final decision, we know who we're bringing on, what role they're going to fill, what value they can bring to the company and that they're the right culture fit that leads to a lasting relationship.

Jason: We're seeing the benefit—huge!

GT: You're investing a ton in this industry. Why are you so confident in this industry and specifically in the houseplant segment?

Frank: That's a visionary question ...

Jason: This industry has seen its ups and downs, but if you look back over the past 50 years, a lot of people would say we are recession-proof. I tend to agree with them. You're always going to go up or down a few percentage points, but there's always been consistent growth.

And then if you look to Europe and how they consume plants, I think our industry has room to double or triple if we could ever get to the consumer purchasing [level] of Europe in this country. How do we get that? By having that consistent quality performance, to where a person can buy the plant and know that they're going to be successful with it. You're seeing it now with the next generation, right? Their Instagram, their TikToks ... you see what they're doing—they're buying 50, 60 plants. We've never had a consumer group that has done that. I think our industry hasn't even scratched the surface on what can be done in this country. We just need to give the consumer a reason to buy. **GT**