GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

7/1/2024

Lessons in Metaphors & Idioms

Jennifer Zurko



As I was wrestling the bear that's become this month's cover story and learning about the topic of acquiring financing for your business, I was worried that I would struggle making sense of everything.

Finance is not in my wheelhouse. I know enough about it to handle my own personal finances, and help Chris and Paul with Ball Publishing's budget. So because it's not one of my major strengths, I have to work harder to make sure I understand it. In order to do that I found myself using metaphors and idioms.

All of my sources said that when you hear about a business going under, regardless of the industry, the reasons why don't just happen overnight. I thought of the saying, "Death by a thousand cuts." I mentioned that to Barry Sturdivant, a longtime green industry financial expert, and he said he liked my terminology.

"In a greenhouse that I've known over the last 25 years, the warning signs were there 10 years earlier," he said. "You can see those warnings, but people still have to have to pay attention and listen."

Art VanWingerden, co-owner and co-CEO of Metrolina Greenhouses, said that for every 10 years in business, he assumes he'll have two bad years, two really good years and six so-so years. Art said many operations that had been struggling since the Great Recession, going into the 2020 and 2021 seasons already in debt, and then spending all of the money they made, couldn't be nimble enough to pivot or change in order to cut down that debt. I thought of a leaky faucet, which drip, drip, drips slowly over a period of time. Eventually, the sink fills up and spills over.

"Any business you're in, you must be nimble," said Art. "You've got to be able to move from one thing to another."

I've spoken to Jim Kennedy, Director of Sales for Ball Seed, about the most recent greenhouse foreclosures and he said something that stuck with me: "Long-term debt is a silent killer." And Barry said that what ends up happening to many businesses is they start borrowing more this year to pay off the money they borrowed last year. And the cycle continues until they can no longer keep up or the bank drops them. I thought of trying to bail water out of a leaky boat or being stuck on a hamster wheel or a row of frogs taking turns leaping over each other.

Those metaphors and idioms helped me while I was writing the cover story. Read it for yourself and see if you think I was able to tame that bear of a topic. I hope you're able to learn from it as much as I did.

We also have the first part of our California Spring Trials coverage. We begin with annuals. And you can see even

more if you flip over to *Green Profit*.

And there's the second part of our series on solar energy in the greenhouse, using PGRs for better branching, mastering contract growing and an update on *Thrips parvispinus*.

Anna Ball says a lot of smart, poignant things and one of them is, "Keep your powder dry." This idiom originally referred to keeping your gunpowder dry so that you could get your musket ready to shoot at a moment's notice. (Apparently, gunpowder doesn't work if it's wet.) But in this instance, Anna was illustrating that you should stay calm and always be ready for the possibility of problems in the future. She says this when she's talking about how Ball Horticultural Company has been able to maintain such a successful business—make smart decisions, don't accrue long-term debt, invest your money wisely.

Before this column gets out of hand, I'm going to stop beating around the bush and end this by the skin of my teeth. Better late than never. (Sorry—we writers are nerds for sayings and idioms.) **GT**