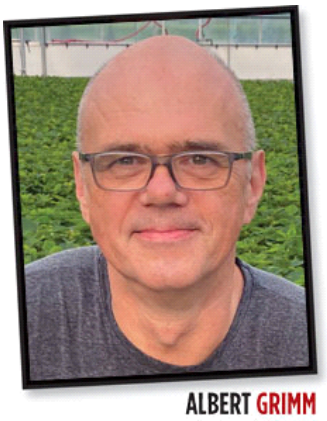
GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

10/1/2024

It’s a Matter of Trust

Albert Grimm



So you want to take on more “responsibility” in your job? Are you sure about this? Isn’t it really “authority” that you’re after? And maybe the accompanying pay raise?

For most of us, professional advancement is synonymous with more authority to make decisions and we want to get paid more for making them. We’d like to call the shots and prove to ourselves and to others that we have it in us. There’s indeed an expectation for responsibility that comes with decision-making, but it’s more like an unpleasant side effect that we would rather avoid. When we accept responsibility, we own the outcomes of our actions. If we happen to create a mess we must volunteer to own it, too, or else we cannot claim integrity or responsibility. This makes us vulnerable and threatens our self-image. Jobs with more responsibility pay more because we take this risk voluntarily.

Occasional trainwrecks are a reality for every decision-maker. They’re an indispensable learning tool. Accepting responsibility in a workplace means that we must own bad outcomes with just as much sincerity as any success that we create. We must accept this ownership even if it feels like having to swallow a toad. With experience this becomes easier, and we can learn how to accept and handle negative outcomes and their consequences with integrity. But we must be able to rely on teams and supervisors that have our back.

And there’s the rub. The prerequisite for a culture of responsibility is a culture of trust. Vertical trust, where leadership trusts their staff and staff trusts their leadership. And horizontal trust, where managers and teams don’t throw each other under the bus. But trust is a fickle affair. It takes years to build and is easily destroyed.

Lack of trust creates insecurity, both among leadership and staff. Insecure leadership breeds mediocrity because supervisors and manager don’t trust the motives of anyone who shows excellence and determination. Insecure staff embrace mediocrity because it may be less detrimental than displaying ambition and investment into the goals of a company when management doesn’t appear transparent and trustworthy. Without a culture of trust most of us will try to seek shelter from any potential fallout by withdrawing into mediocrity and by refusing ownership of any problem. The house may be on fire, but nobody dares to sound the alarm.

How do we create a culture of trust? It requires commitment from everyone, management and staff, independent of where they find themselves in the hierarchy of an organization. Specialized external consultants can help start this process. In the meantime, there are some principles we can implement in our daily work lives:

If you hold a leadership role you should:

■ Stay true to your instructions. Communicate expectations with great clarity.

■ Never criticize your team for the results of miscommunicated expectations.

■ Delegate with enthusiasm and show that you mean it.

■ As much as possible, avoid interfering in the tasks that you've delegated.

■ If you must micromanage, make it clear that you do so because YOU failed to communicate accurately.

■ When you make a mistake, admit it openly. Swallow that toad.

■ When criticism becomes necessary, don't single out any individual in front of the team. Either address the entire team or else keep the conversation private.

■ When praise is due, let it be known to both the individual and to the team.

If your work reports to someone in a leadership role you should:

■ Communicate frankly and politely with your boss. Develop the guts that it takes to communicate both the good and the bad.

■ Don't engage in the omnipresent gossip, which often aims to discredit those in leadership positions.

■ Act with integrity: Don't throw your colleagues under the bus. Beware of gossip traps.

■ When you're given authority, take ownership of your decisions, good or bad.

■ Respect the hierarchy of authority. If the company trusts you enough to let you make decisions, don't use this authority to sidestep your supervisor.

■ Don't be afraid to communicate approval when your supervisor helped you or your team to better outcomes, or even if you had a good day at work. Praise works in both directions. **GT**

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