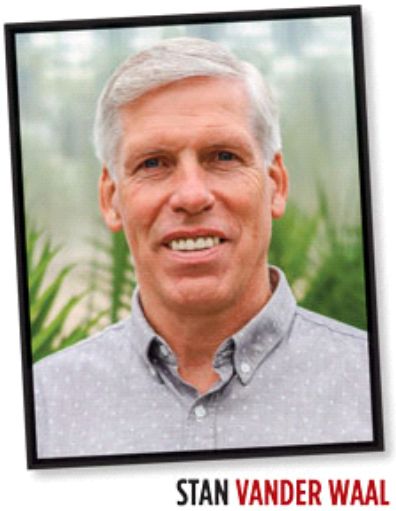
GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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Growing a Business & Engaging a Team

Stan Vander Waal



This year our family company celebrates 40 years—truly a privilege—and we acknowledge our Lord for this Blessing! As I draft this article, I reflect on the changes we've experienced, the lessons learned and our team who, like family, have been a part of our success. We're a family business in succession and leadership transition, and I think about what advice to give the next generation and leaders of our company. Most of us have experience or hope for business growth over the years. This usually comes in the form of area, personnel, product lines, customers, increased complexity and new challenges.

Let's focus on a few key advice items that are critical for businesses of any size:

Humility: As owners, this is personal. It's also a company core value—something we look for in interviews. It also engages industry peers, opens doors with customers and vendors, and provides for comfortable networking. Our industry is fairly open and collaborative, which increases learning while advancing the sector. Humility is the foundation of learning and mutual trust and embracing sharing.

Our team travels doing visits we call "market walks," translating into sharing and taking home innovative ideas to better a process, product or team collaboration.

Embracing humility in our teams (top to bottom) unlocks essential team collaboration, generating optimization of process, better quality, and enhanced employee satisfaction and willingness to change or adapt.

It’s a team effort: We live in a fast-paced and ever-changing world—to survive we must be willing to adapt and pivot. Challenges such as the labor market, retail environment, increased government regulation and increasing costs all suggest a need for deep awareness of the business landscape. As our businesses grow the team approach is essential. Let’s consider a couple of things the team must know and do:

- Your company’s vision is essential to understanding your purpose and offering. It captures the opportunity for growth. Have you evaluated your relevance in the current and future market? I suggest completing an honest “SWOT” assessment (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) of your company and teams. Don’t overthink it—be practical, live it in every aspect of your day and use its guidance as road lines. Past successes are no guarantee for future successes.
- Collaborate in an open and honest way. Check our egos at the door and be laser focused on the best possible solution to the discussion at hand. True collaboration relies on the ability to pivot, as circumstances and needs can change quickly. A good dose of humility will open our mind to others’ ideas rather than “my” focused solutions. Winning strategies come from teams who complement each other, working in unison and avoiding personal interests to advance the company’s team objective.
- Sharing: Reflecting on the past 40 years I realized the way we connected with our teams has changed significantly. We began with my wife and I communicating and sharing the vision—the tactical job approach, the risks at hand and even celebrating great wins that simply flowed naturally. I would say we continued to share in this way effectively with a team of up to 125 personnel, so what changed and what do we do differently now?
- Changes, such as adding more sites, can create team silos. Over 40 years people come and go, including key positions. Tasks are executed through teams who depend on other teams to execute efficiently. The old way of naturally flowing information (sharing info) no longer worked.
- Sharing in a whole new way the vision of where we’re going. What the goals are requires greater transparency of the data by department. This sharing gives our teams the goal post and the scoreboard, showing in real time wins and losses.
- Sharing the data creates team confidence, as they live the “game,” adapting as needed to reach the set objectives. Sharing also gives a stronger sense of ownership, while supporting visibility of specific KPIs.

Today’s world requires transparency at the highest level for our customers, our suppliers, the authorities, our employees—and don’t forget the consumers who buy our products! Embracing today’s technology of great tools in communication and AI make sharing effective and quick. AI tools can help process and share the information, avoiding pressure on teams and wasting time.

After 40 years of continuing to learn, we remind ourselves of humility in all things—it’s foundational to the growth and maintenance of team loyalty. Greater transparency through sharing intentionally will support greater collaboration and enhance team confidence. Our ability to pivot and adapt in a fast world determines the distance we go and the comfort of the journey. **GT**

Stan Vander Waal is CEO of RainbowGreenhouses, Inc. in Chilliwack, BritishColumbia, Canada.