

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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Maintaining a Good Split

Davy Wright



DAVY WRIGHT

Running a greenhouse operation with your spouse is a gift and a test. My parents did it, but there were days when words and plants would fly. Growing up, I never saw boundaries between work and home or my parents. Heather and I knew we had to work together and go home together. We had to find a better way. In other words, how we split power and responsibility decides whether our days feel calm or chaotic.

Here's what saved us: We keep two doors, work and home. Problems at work stay at work, problems at home stay at home. This rule sounds small, but it protects dinner, sleep and kindness. If we must cross the line, we ask first, keep it brief and return to the right room.

We also wear different hats at work. Heather is the CEO, our outside voice. She's the one that everyone sees and hears. People on the outside often hear about me, but wonder if I'm real or a myth, as they rarely see or hear me. She points the ship and speaks for the brand. She handles customer relations, sales, accounting and government affairs.

I'm the COO, our inside voice. I run the daily flow. I handle staff, maintenance, crop schedules and growing. It took time to get here. We tested, swapped, argued and learned. Now the split fits us like good work gloves—snug, strong and ready for most anything.

Our biggest challenge is not love or grit, it's information. Decisions break when we don't see the same picture. Clear decisions remove friction. Money stays visible. We split the budget into simple buckets. Heather handles targets and accounts receivables; I handle cost per unit and actuals by stage.

Heather decides pricing after I confirm capacity and crop mix. I set labor and timing; she approves the budget. I beg for new equipment; she sets me straight. In emergencies, I command the floor. We don't add a crop, equipment or product discount without seeing the math. Two leaders. One voice.

Clarity calms fear.

Risk is real, so we prepare and practice. Temperature and power alarms are tested monthly (or at least I try). Back-up plans are made and backups to those are sometimes thought out. Heater checks happen before the first cold snap. Irrigation lines stay clean. Quarantine holds for suspect plants are implemented. PPE is stocked and

chemicals are ready. I handle the plan; Heather funds it.

If we fall short of customer expectations, they're fixed quickly by any means necessary. I lead and Heather manages communications. We triage high-value crops first, take photos and debrief. One voice outside, one leader inside.

Great plants come from great people. We hire with short field tests and score for care, pace and attention. We train by explaining, doing, watching and checking. Then we praise and coach to encourage. The crew reports to me to avoid two-boss chaos, which still happens at times when I can't be found.

A short list keeps us honest: on-time tasks, rooting success, shrink, labor per unit, sell-through, margin and safety. I update operations; Heather updates sales. We watch trends, not just bad days. Before spring, we plan for labor, space, freight, weather and what-ifs, so the sprint feels like a show, not a storm.

When big buys tempt us, we decide like grownups. We write out the problem, options, costs, advantages, disadvantages, risks and return. I write the case; Heather decides. Then we both own it. We still disagree sometimes. We argue in private with facts, end with one decision and circle back if feelings linger. If a choice fails, we run a short after-action: what we expected, what happened and what we try next.

We guard our home, too. A "close-the-book" alarm ends work talk each evening. In peak season, one of us is always available. We take a simple lunch together at least once a week, no phones. We do our best to take a vacation together in the off-season. (And, no, Cultivate doesn't count as a vacation.)

This structure gives us resilience and peace of mind. Start with two hats, map the work, write the rules, post the numbers, practice the handoff. Most of all, we don't keep score. We choose grace. We go home happy! **GT**

Davy Wright is COO of Wright's Nursery & Greenhouse in Plantersville, Alabama.