

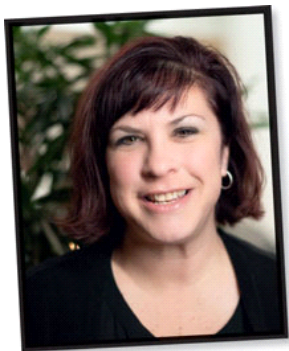
GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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Milestone Musings

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This month brings a milestone birthday for me. It's not something I want to shout from the rooftops. I've decided to celebrate it with a handful of small events with different friend and family groups than with a big blow-out party. In my mind, it lessens the blow of getting older, I guess.

Looking back at other milestone birthdays I'm struck by how much has changed. At 21, I was open to a million possibilities and my life was a blank canvas. At 30, I was experiencing a lot of personal struggles and there were a lot of unknowns. At 40, life was good and my professional life was really starting to take shape. Now, at 50, almost every stage of my life has been in a constant state of change, good and bad. I read somewhere that when you turn 50, you're the oldest young person and the

youngest old person. That makes sense to me.

Milestone birthdays force you to grapple with the present you, but also make you look ahead to the future you. For so long, I was like, "I'm here, right now." Recently, it's changed to: "I'm here ...but where am I going and where will I be in 10 or 20 years?" The prospect of eventually having someone take my place at Ball Publishing is weird to think about, but at some point it's also necessary. I have a decent-sized ego, but not enough hubris to think that I'm irreplaceable. The ability to know when it's time to let go is a gift that not all of us have. I, for one, do not want my Golden Years to be spent still haggling over a magazine layout; I need that time to spend in my beach house in Mexico (still TBD).

That's why having generational change in the workplace is so important and why the sessions on succession planning at industry events are so popular. It's not just to make sure that you'll continue to have the staff to keep the business moving forward, but that you have a plan to pass on the invaluable knowledge you've gained throughout the years.

GrowerTalks contributor and industry consultant Rayne Gibson discusses this in his piece about training your next head grower. And it's not just about developing an on-boarding process during face-to-face training—you need to document each process, too.

Which is what Katie Elzer-Peters dives into in her piece about documenting your Standard Operating Procedures—not just for a head grower position, but for many aspects of your business. Find out how to get your SOPs in writing (or not) and whether you need them for everything (or not).

And once you get these new employees in the door, that's not where the story ends. Employee engagement leads to higher satisfaction, which in turn leads to higher productivity. It goes beyond throwing a pizza party twice a year (although those are nice!), and includes tangible metrics that generate positive outcomes for your business.

Neal Glatt is a leadership consultant who helps horticulture businesses with team building and employee engagement. We checked with AmericanHort and his talks at Cultivate'25 were in the Top 10 most-attended educational sessions, so we asked if he would kindly provide some deep-dive insight about employee engagement. Look for more articles from Neal in *GrowerTalks* through 2026.

In his column, our pal Art Parkerson talks about the recent news that Ken Fisher, president and CEO of AmericanHort, is stepping down this spring. In the announcement, Ken said, "... I believe now is the right time for new leadership, new energy and new ideas to carry the organization forward." Art talks about how much he's appreciated Ken's leadership during his 10-year tenure and that he continues to show that leadership by knowing when it's time to step back and make room for the next person.

I'm not close to hangin' it up yet—far from it! But experiencing a milestone kind of forces you to look back to where you came from, contemplate where you are now and envision where you see yourself in the future. I've had a couple of good mentors in my life; now I'm starting to realize that it's my turn to be a mentor to someone else.

Happy holidays to you and yours! **GT**