GROWERTALKS

Paul's Pointers

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Time for a Seasonal Reset

Paul Pilon



Whether your core business is growing, manufacturing, distribution or sales, there's a certain amount of seasonality in this industry that we've all become familiar with and have adapted to as normal cycles. Although a seasonal cycle varies slightly in duration and/or intensity from one year to another, most of us simply repeat what we've done in the past when entering each new seasonal period.

This is human nature, as we're largely creatures of habit. It seems most comfortable or familiar repeating the past or approaching the future in the same manner we've done in previous cycles or seasons. This approach works when historically things went well; however, repeating bad habits or procedures doesn't usually lead to favorable outcomes.

I don't know what season you find yourself in at this moment. Most of us are likely in-between seasons (depending on if you're reading this at the time of publication or at a later date), with the workload likely being considerably slower than in our peak seasons. If so, I hope you've been enjoying it and have been able to rest both the body and mind during this time.

If you know me, you already know that my mind is always thinking about the future while living in the present. I'm always thinking of how to change or improve various outcomes for the next cycle. These improvements can be how to increase crop quality, decrease shrink, improve efficiencies or how to maximize sales. The items you'd like to improve could be similar to these, but most likely, will be specific to your job and what roles you have within an organization.

I really like to analyze and strategize areas to improve during these slower seasons. Part of this process is going through each crop, procedure or program (these should be specific to your role or falls within your department) and identifying the details that worked well and, more importantly, those that didn't.

Sounds easy, doesn't it? However, I'm guessing that you'll soon learn how many of the important facts or the very specific details your mind is having trouble recalling.

Many of us blame our age for our memories not being as sharp as they once were. That could be part of it, but what I observe is that many individuals carry great responsibilities on their shoulders and sometimes this weight, along

with the depth and diversity of our jobs, can inhibit us from remembering some of the specific details of past seasons.

This is when the notes you wrote down in a notebook, kept in a folder/binder or entered into your smartphone during the busy season will come in handy. You've been keeping notes, haven't you? If not, I encourage you to start this new habit of writing down the items in real time that you see need to be improved in the future or how the changes you recently implemented are working out.

By no means am I advocating that all details need to change in order to move forward. As with most managers, I'm a creature of habit, too, and absolutely want to repeat what's worked well in the past. But I'm open to and actively looking for ways to improve myself, my professional roles and the teams I work with, with the expectation of obtaining improvements, overcoming past obstacles or challenges, and making positive forward progress along the way.

Here are a few pointers to help you approach these seasonal improvements:

- Identify all the processes and details that have worked well in the past. These are items to definitely repeat in future seasons.
- Evaluate any new procedures that were implemented in the previous season. How well did they work? Were improvements made? Should they become a standard practice, be modified or dropped altogether?
- Review any items identified (from memory or the notes you took) from the previous busy season that would benefit from being done differently in the future.
- Identify a few changes for improvements to implement in the next busy season. These can be ideas you and/or your team came up with, results from research you've conducted, concepts you've learned about in trade publications or events, or things you've gleaned from your peers.
- Determine how to turn these ideas into reality. How are you going to implement these improvements? What? Who? When? And how?
- In addition to improvements to plans and procedures that previously existed, consider any new items or programs to incorporate into the new season. These can be new opportunities for sales or new out-of-the-box ways of increasing efficiencies. Think growth opportunities for the future.

I encourage you to take the time during slow seasons to reflect on past experiences, identify opportunities for improvements, and to formulate ideas and plans that can be implemented in the upcoming busy season. I challenge you to find at least one area for an improvement, and to derive and implement a strategy to achieve this goal. Then I encourage you to challenge each of your managers to do the same. Imagine the outcome if you successfully implemented a positive change along with the other managers around you. These types of improvements are not only beneficial; they're necessary to ensure survival in this highly competitive, low-margin industry we work in. **GT**

Paul Pilon is National Sales Manager for Pace 49, Inc. and editor-at-large of the Perennial Pulse *newsletter. He can be reached at paul@pace49.com.*