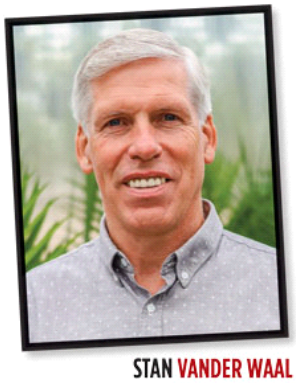
GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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# On “Fire” With Opportunity

*Stan Vander Waal*




Recently, my team and I traveled to the Ontario area to meet with peer growers and key customers. We came home on fire with ideas, concluding this trip was nothing but awesome. The collaboration we experienced and the ideation that flowed from it was exhilarating!

I’m a strong believer in the value of “market” trips to peer growers, sharing valuable insights resulting in innovation of process and experience. In Susie Raker’s *GrowerTalks* article from July 2025, “Collaboration as the Secret to Innovation & Lasting Impact,” she quoted a statement by Anna Ball: “The future belongs to collaborators.” The beauty of our industry is we are truly collaborative; we share and learn from each other, which advances innovation and drives consumer purchases.

I’d like to share some of what we learned, which translates into real time savings and opportunities, resulting in real-time bottom-line gains.

**Customer/vendor meeting**

Reflecting on where the magic happened, it was from our discussions around dinner the night before. Magic occurs when the opportunity to talk and strategize approaches to grow sales in a collaborative versus transactional conversation results in innovative solutions. The best part: When the customer asks, “What more would you like to do with us?” Yes, this kind of question gets me fired up and the fun begins with millions in sales opportunity.

**Critical points for a successful meeting:**

- Know your numbers in sales revenue and margins by store and by item, and competitive shop position.
- Know intimately your customer or prospective customer, their objectives, values and strategy.
- Build a presentation that comes “alive” and is fun and engaging. Assure relevant “WIIFM” (what’s in it for me).
- Know the market: Presenting with good market insight builds confidence. Be armed with industry insights, trends and statistics, which identifies opportunity.
- Your sales pitch should be ready and intentional in what you hope to achieve. Personally, I believe in being direct. Sell your story of value and innovation.
- Be prepared with tactical options to avoid a basic price conversation. Value is not determined by price

alone!

- Opportunity: It's essential to quantify the pitch's dollar opportunity.
- Rehearse if presenting as a team. Use appropriate lead-ins, which demonstrate a high-performing team.

**Peer grower visits**

We visited seven growers in a day-and-a-half, coming home with some profound knowledge, and this was mutual for the growers we visited. (Giving credit to the growers we visited: Foliera, Jeffery's, Willowbrook, Casa Orchids, Cosmic, Kamps and Orchard Park.) I'll share some key takeaways by theme.

**Production tactical learnings:**

- Defoliating by gassing proved to be a highly effective process, saving countless hours of leaf stripping and reducing Botrytis in cooling.
- Use of blackout curtains as a tool to increase cooling was very effective while maintaining humidity easily.
- The benefits of water retention pond aeration to enhance water quality.
- Miscanthus use as a soil top dressing for weed barrier.
- One grower experienced 99% success with a robotic sticking machine, which was music to my ears—there's hope we might get there with ours.
- Learning approaches to long crop plants by "bulking" up plants in high light/low energy demand times of the year following a more natural cost-effective growing path.
- Although basic, the concept of using lighting and shading tools to extend the selling window.

**Market insights:**

- Trade issues, which at first hit hard, are mostly contained to non-CUSMA inputs, such as value-add pots. The knock-on effect is the risk of confidence from some U.S. customers.
- Supply chain disruptions, such as the demise of the Bunnick Group and in some areas of young plant sources are creating some uncertainty, requiring risk-management adjustments.
- Discussion of tactical approaches on many specific programs, which had significant sales impact.
- Enterprise resource planning systems & technology
- The magic bullet …? NO—each of us is on a journey and spending a small fortune with a goal to understand item cost, productivity levels, and sales and production process tracking.
- We talked about four different software providers and the journeys with dealing with the same challenges to lesser or greater degrees.
- What we all agreed on:
    - We need greater insight in to costing.
    - We must increase labor cost transparency
    - We must document process flow (from our heads to systems)
    - We must share experience versus working in isolation
    - The importance of recording tasks and timing
    - There is NO magic bullet!

- These are essential tools for our futures

Quoting Anna Ball's words, "The future belongs to collaborators," I could not agree more! Do you now know why I chose "On 'Fire' With Opportunity" for this column? There are so many opportunities we could embrace. At Rainbow, we're reflecting on these insights and focusing on the lowest-hanging fruit (20% effort/80% return). These become the first things we initiate. **GT**

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