

GROWERTALKS

Acres & Acres

1/30/2026

What I'm Learning From Our YGA Winners

Chris Beytes



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I've been working on a fun project this winter: a podcast featuring our Young Grower Award winners. There have been 21 of them since we first launched the award; I hope to get them all to go on the record about their careers in horticulture and, importantly, what we can do to attract more enthusiastic young talent to our industry.

Our Young Grower Award (currently sponsored by Ball Horticultural Company, BASF and AmericanHort) is designed to recognize the bright, young (under-35) folks who've chosen horticulture as their career. They're all sharp enough to do most anything for a living, so we want to thank them for blessing us with their passion, skills and leadership.

Anyway, in the podcast I'm picking their brains on a range of topics and I wanted to share a few of their thoughts here. Look for the podcasts at youtube.com/growertalks (I'm launching one a week starting January 1).

What makes for a good boss? (Stephanie Saccamano, 2020 YGA winner):

"There's an acronym that I've been floating around with Gary [her boss] for a while. It's 'Have a clear SPACE.' Space is the acronym: Structure, Process, Authority, Communication and Expectations. Well, that's a big package of information. How do you clarify that? Essentially, like if I could boil that down, it's having a clear understanding of who gives what call at the end of the day. You know, if there are five very opinionated growers who want to do things one way or another, who has final say? Who's taking responsibility? Because if there are too many cooks in the kitchen, that's a disaster. So clarify that.

"I think another great aspect of being a leader or being a boss is giving people the space to make a decision. If they're equipped with the information, there are a lot of ways to do something right. And it doesn't always have to be your specific way, so give them some breathing room. Let them make the decision."

Advice for business owners looking to attract and keep bright young talent. (Isabela Chamorro, 2025 YGA winner):

"Give opportunities to the person who is willing to learn. Like maybe this person doesn't know all of it yet, like all the

technical details, but always see the person. Are they reliable? Do they have passion? Is this person ready to sacrifice this time of her life to come and jump in this adventure of growing? And my other advice is to always reward the ones going the extra mile.”

A favorite interview question when seeking employees who are good problem-solvers. (John Terhesh, 2019 YGA winner):

“I ask a really weird question, usually at the end. And that is, ‘If you were to paint the moon blue, how many gallons of paint would that take?’ I don’t even know the answer to this—what I really want to know is what they talk about, the steps to get there. Do they talk about the logistics of getting the paint up to the moon? Do they talk about figuring out the circumference? Do they talk about doing research on how much paint gets absorbed in moon dust? I’ve heard, ‘Blue is not a good color. We should do white so we could just do one coat instead of two.’ But the answer is not important. It’s the train of thought. Because if I’m hiring somebody as a problem-solver, I don’t want to hear them say, “Oh, I’m going to need a calculator.” Because you’re going to face problems you don’t know. What are your steps to solve them?”

Where to look for trends that can help you sell more plants? (Jill Mullaney, 2017 Young Grower winner):

“If you want to lean into the younger crowd—which I begrudgingly have to do—look at what they’re doing on Instagram or TikTok. If you can just pick up on the colors and the vibes that they’re giving off and probably market towards that … you know, I see a lot of people doing vintage-y things a lot. That’s kind of a trend that’s coming around.”

Advice for the next generation of Young Grower Award winner. (Drew Groezinger, 2024 YGA winner):

“You’ve got to be confident in who you are as a person. You’ve got to be able and willing to handle someone telling you no. You might not like it. It might take you a while to process some of that rejection that you might feel. But the really wonderful thing about horticulture is that it’s not just bedding plants. It’s not just poinsettias. It’s not just cut flowers. There are so many homes in the horticulture industry that we need people to live in and get comfortable in. Just because you might be starting at a garden center and in charge of a product line now doesn’t mean that that’s where you need to be for the rest of your career. So stay hungry, stay excited, stay positive and always be investing in yourself.” **GT**