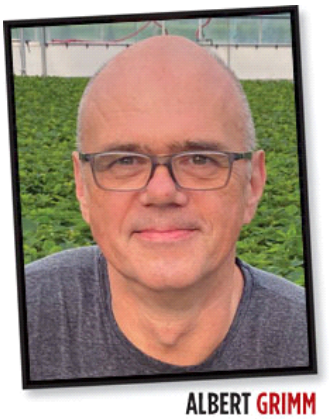
GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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So What Are You Going to Do About It?

Albert Grimm



Greenhouse growers are a passionate breed. We invest much of our sense of self-esteem and pride in the outcomes and accomplishments of our work. This investment comes at a cost. Irrational demands for perfection are a common reality in an industry that depends on imperfect inputs. We must be on constant guard against myriad crop and equipment failures, some of which are not in our control. The accumulated stress from such unrelenting, perpetual and often futile watchfulness takes a toll on our physical and mental stamina. We accept this pressure because we love the nature of our work, but if we don't mitigate the associated stress and workaholism, they will eventually catch up with us.

Like so many other growers, I've been there. I'd reached physical and mental breaking points where I seriously considered leaving this industry for a mindless job where I could trade meaning for sanity. It was during one of these difficult times when Mrs. R crossed my path.

She was a human resources manager in the true sense of the word. She could have easily dismissed me as another piece of collateral workplace damage, but instead she began to teach me how to manage this hyper-vigilance, which is a mandatory aspect of a grower's skill set. Her method was simple. She always had an open ear for my grievances about the unfairness of the greenhouse world. She listened very patiently. Then, instead of giving advice, she always answered with the same words: "So what are you going to do about it?"

When we're stuck in the middle of professional and mental turmoil it's very tempting to focus on our perceived sense of injustice. Any cop-out looks appealing, but merely dwelling on grievances only prevents us from looking for solutions. We get stuck in a form of circular thinking and we can no longer see the real reason for our troubles. Nothing changes unless we take the steps to change ourselves and the perspective from which we look at the world.

Anxiety, exhaustion and burnout are endemic among greenhouse specialists. This is bad for morale, motivation and dedication of those who pull the weight in our operations. The industry ought to take this problem seriously. Lack of staff motivation is a common complaint among greenhouse managers and supervisors. That is, if they can even find staff worth motivating. We complain about lack of engagement when others are indifferent to our challenges of operating a greenhouse, but this is merely a different version of the same cop-out. Instead of lamenting, I would suggest the same question: "What are we going to do about it?" Or maybe its stronger form: "What should we

change about ourselves if we want to find a solution for our problems?”

Mrs. R would tell us that a good first step would be to accept imperfection. If our demands for perfection are irrational, we encourage our staff to become overwhelmed by our expectations. Eventually, they either leave the industry or they burn out from uninhibited workaholism. We cannot motivate others by smothering their passion for greenhouse work with our own perfectionism. If we believe our competency to be absolute, we don’t leave any room for others to find meaning and dignity in their work. So, if we want to motivate people, we must focus on changing ourselves and our own expectations instead of trying to change the people who happen to be the targets of these expectations.

Perfectionism and the need to dominate with our expectations are common symptoms of low self-esteem. If we want to become better at motivating others, we should learn how to relax and give ourselves some slack. Then we ought to learn how to like ourselves, even when we are not perfect. If we can be happier with ourselves, maybe we can be happier with others. If this makes everybody’s workdays less stressful it might just give them the motivation that we’re looking for. So what are YOU going to do about it? **GT**

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