

GROWERTALKS

Features

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What They Need to Succeed

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Managers today are being asked to produce more results with the same, or fewer, people. In the green industry that pressure is intensified by seasonality, labor shortages, weather volatility and rising customer expectations. When performance slips, the conversation often turns to work ethic, accountability or “finding better people.”

But in many cases, the real issue isn’t motivation at all. One of the most overlooked drivers of engagement and performance is whether employees

believe they have the right tools to do their work properly.

Beyond tangible tools

When leaders think about tools, they often picture physical assets like trucks, POS systems, hand-held scanners, irrigation equipment, skid steers, tablets or headsets. These physical tools absolutely matter to job performance. A delivery driver with a failing vehicle or a retail associate with a frozen POS system can’t perform at a high level, no matter how engaged they are.

But research shows that employees consider if they’re equipped to do a job well, they define “tools” much more broadly and include five categories of tools that shape performance: hardware, software, humanware, time and communication

Hardware includes physical tools and equipment. Software includes systems, processes and access to information. Humanware refers to staffing levels, coverage and how requests are handled. Time reflects whether employees can do work well given the deadline and availability to perform the work. Communication ensures alignment on priorities, expectations and standards. A lack of any one of these “tools” can quietly sabotage performance for any team.

Consider a garden center during peak spring season—customers are lined up, inventory is moving quickly and the team is under pressure. A cashier is rushing because the POS system lags when processing returns. A department associate can’t answer plant questions because signage hasn’t been updated or the plant database is outdated. A manager is covering three roles because the schedule is understaffed.

From the outside, it looks like stress, impatience or disengagement. From the employee’s perspective, it feels like trying to do quality work with one hand tied behind their back.

Gallup surveys show that only about one in three employees strongly agree they have the tools they need to do their job right. Even fewer strongly agree that they've told their manager what they need most and why. Over time, employees stop asking—not because the need disappears, but because experience has taught them it won't change.

An environment for engagement

Managers who do well helping employees feel prepared for the job regularly outperform those who don't in both production and retention, leading to significant return on investment. In fact, teams that perform well on employees' perception of having the right tools for the job regularly see 20% to 40% higher employee retention than those who do poorly.

One of the most important caveats about equipping employees is that perceptions of tools vary dramatically between teams, even when resources are similar. Two landscape crews may have identical equipment. Two retail locations may run the same POS and inventory systems. Yet one team thrives while the other struggles.

The difference isn't the tools, it's the ability of the manager to create an environment where teams are able to freely express ideas and meet expectations. Effective managers create space for honest conversations about what's working and what's getting in the way. They ask questions early, listen without defensiveness and respond consistently. Poor managers unintentionally teach employees that asking for help is inconvenient, risky or pointless.

In horticulture and operations-heavy environments, this shows up in subtle ways like a grower who doesn't speak up about unreliable climate controls, a crew member who improvises because replacement parts are hard to request or a sales associate who stops flagging inaccurate inventory because it slows the line. Great managers ensure that small issues don't transform into employee disengagement.

Instead of assuming what tools employees may need, the best managers seek to understand what employees are struggling with and collaboratively determine the proper toolkit.

These questions often sound like:

- What tools or information are essential for you to do quality work?
- Where do systems or processes slow you down?
- Do you have enough time to do this part of the job right—not just fast?
- What causes the most frustration in your day?
- If you could fix one thing tomorrow, what would it be?

In a garden retail setting, this may uncover training gaps around new plant introductions or promotions, while in operations roles it often surfaces unclear priorities, outdated processes or staffing mismatches during peak periods.

One of the biggest misconceptions managers hold is that asking about tools creates expectations they can't meet. In reality, employees don't expect perfection, but they do want their opinions to count and issues to be heard. Often more important than granting requests is quickly and honestly responding to them.

For example, if a team requests additional seasonal help that isn't feasible, a manager who explains the reasoning, explores alternatives and revisits the plan later builds far more trust than one who ignores the request altogether. When employees understand the why, they're more willing to adapt.

High-performing teams don't rely on managers alone to solve resource challenges. Instead, managers involve

employees in identifying workarounds and improvements. This might look like frontline staff helping redesign customer flow during peak weekends, crews suggesting better equipment staging to reduce downtime or sales teams refining CRM processes to reduce duplicate work. When employees help shape how work gets done, they move from executing tasks to owning outcomes, which fuels both engagement and accountability.

One of the most overlooked tools managers control is time. In fast-paced industries, the pressure to move quickly can unintentionally undermine quality, safety and morale.

When schedules are packed too tightly, training is rushed or administrative tasks spill into personal time, employees feel constantly behind. Over time, that pressure leads to shortcuts, mistakes and burnout. High-performing managers regularly ask: Do my people have enough time to do this work well?

Adjusting expectations, sequencing work more thoughtfully or protecting focused time during critical periods can dramatically improve both results and retention. For managers looking to improve performance without adding complexity, start with one habit of regularly asking the team what they need to succeed.

This doesn't require new systems or bigger budgets, but rather curiosity, consistency and credibility. Over time, these conversations surface inefficiencies that were hiding in plain sight and unlock productivity that already exists within the team.

The right tools do more than just make work easier, they remove unnecessary stress, restore pride in quality work and create conditions where people can perform at their best. High performance is built when managers ensure their people are equipped, supported and aligned. When that happens, engagement rises, turnover falls and results follow season after season. **GT**

Neal Glatt is a Gallup Certified Strengths Coach and leadership consultant who partners with landscaping and horticulture businesses to drive growth through engaged teams and stronger sales. Learn more or book a call at NealGlatt.com.