GROWERTALKS

Features

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Focus on What They Do Best

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When leaders look for ways to increase production, the conversation often centers on efficiency, systems and accountability. In horticulture, landscaping, garden retail and other seasonal service industries, the pressure to produce more within compressed windows can lead managers to tighten controls, standardize roles and push teams harder. While these efforts can create short-term gains, sustained higher production usually comes from a different approach of aligning people's daily work with what they naturally do best.

Gallup research shows that employees who have the opportunity to use their strengths every day are significantly more engaged and productive, and teams that consistently align work with individual talents experience higher performance and lower turnover. Yet only about one in three employees strongly agrees that they get to do what they do best each day. That gap represents one of the largest untapped productivity opportunities available to most organizations.

Striving for better alignment

In operational environments, production challenges are often mistaken for motivation problems when they're actually alignment problems. Consider a growing operation where the most detail-oriented team member is assigned primarily to fast-paced physical tasks, while the individual who thrives on speed and physical output is regularly asked to manage client inquiries and documentation. Both employees may be hardworking and committed, yet neither is positioned to perform at their highest level. Over time, frustration builds, output slows and managers begin to question engagement when the real issue is role alignment.

Garden retail environments offer similar examples. A highly knowledgeable plant enthusiast may spend most of their shift restocking shelves rather than helping customers make confident buying decisions, while a naturally outgoing associate who excels in conversation may be assigned mostly to back-of-house preparation work. When strengths are overlooked, businesses unintentionally leave sales, customer service quality and employee satisfaction on the table.

A strengths-based management approach begins with understanding how each employee naturally contributes. Some people naturally bring urgency, momentum and energy to their work; others bring organization, precision and

reliability. Some excel at solving problems and improving processes, while others are at their best when building relationships and creating positive customer experiences. None of these strengths are more valuable than the others, but each produces higher output when matched to the right type of work.

Managers who take a strengths-based approach make it a habit to learn what each individual enjoys most about their role, where they feel most confident and which responsibilities consistently bring out their best performance. These conversations don't need to be complicated. Simple questions, such as, "Which parts of your job give you the most energy?", "Where do you feel you contribute the most to the team?" or "If you could spend more time on one type of task, what would it be?" can quickly reveal important patterns. Over time, these insights allow managers to make small adjustments that significantly increase both productivity and engagement.

Another useful conversation starter is asking employees, "What gets in the way of you doing your best work?" This question often uncovers workflow inefficiencies, unclear priorities or process barriers that limit production more than effort ever does. Employees frequently have practical solutions that managers may not see because they're closest to the daily work. Inviting those perspectives creates both better systems and stronger ownership of outcomes.

Putting it into practice

In horticulture and landscaping operations, strengths-based alignment doesn't mean rewriting every job description. Instead, it often involves subtle shifts. A crew member who excels at equipment maintenance may take greater responsibility for daily inspections and readiness checks. A team member with strong customer communication skills may handle client updates or onsite walk-throughs. An employee with exceptional organization skills may manage staging areas, inventory flow or project preparation. These small adjustments allow individuals to spend more time where they naturally produce the most value.

Retail teams can apply the same concept by scheduling associates based on strengths during peak periods. Employees who naturally thrive in high-interaction roles can be positioned on the sales floor during busy weekends, while those who excel in organization and detail can focus on merchandising, inventory accuracy and presentation standards. Over time, the entire operation becomes smoother because each person is contributing in the way that fits them best.

Managers can further strengthen this approach by asking forward-looking questions during regular one-on-one conversations: "Where would you like to grow your skills this season?", "Which responsibilities would you like more opportunities to take on?" or "How can I help position you to do more of what you do best?" These discussions communicate that development isn't only about fixing weaknesses, but also about expanding strengths. As employees feel increasingly positioned for success, they bring more initiative and creativity to their work.

A strengths-based approach doesn't remove the need for accountability, standards or cross-training. Every team member still needs to perform the essential requirements of the role. However, when the majority of an employee's time is spent using their strongest talents, the remaining responsibilities feel more manageable, energy levels remain higher and overall productivity increases. Teams begin to experience what many leaders are striving for in people who are both highly engaged and highly productive.

Higher production rarely comes from pushing people harder for extended periods of time; it comes from positioning them more intelligently. When managers understand the unique strengths on their team, have consistent conversations about how work is aligned and make small adjustments that allow employees to use their best talents every day, output rises naturally. Over the course of a season, these incremental improvements compound into faster execution, stronger customer experiences and better retention of top performers.

Organizations often invest heavily in equipment, technology and systems to improve production, yet overlook one of the most powerful levers available: ensuring that each person is consistently working in ways that match how they naturally perform best. When managers adopt a strengths-based mindset, they unlock productivity that already exists within their teams. The result is not only higher production, but a workforce that's more energized, more confident and more committed to delivering results year after year. **GT**

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