GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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What Will Be Your Legacy?

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Have you ever thought about your legacy? How people will remember you after you leave this mortal coil? What you'll leave for the generations that follow?

Now that I'm of a certain age, the morbid part of me has already started thinking about my funeral, but I've never really spent time thinking about how I'll actually be remembered.

This occurred to me as I was talking to Susie Raker for this month's cover story. We've reported on it and I'm sure you've heard about Firefly, the glow-in-the-dark petunia. And you may have a strong opinion about it. But my story isn't about Firefly the product—it's about how Firefly was introduced to the marketplace.

We are a skeptical industry—some might even say adverse to major change. And that may be true in some cases. But there are those who, when presented with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do something really different, take the challenge straight on.

That's the folks who started Rooted in Solutions. Susie—along with her Production Manager Casey Stanton and Jim Devereux of Green Fuse—were presented with the chance to not only bring the first bioluminescent plant to the market, but to put the work in to make it better, opening the door to create a whole new category. So they created a whole new company dedicated to this new endeavor.

Regardless of how you feel about Firefly—whether you think it's super cool or a flash-in-the-pan—you have to admit that it's an interesting concept. And Susie, Casey and Jim felt strongly that it was interesting enough to take a chance on going through the hurdles of bringing it to market.

It hasn't been easy—from crafting the right messaging for an unprecedented product to dealing with a lot of doubtful colleagues to navigating through a super-charged breeding program—but they have attracted a lot of interest. And they have sold an impressive amount of units for essentially an untested plant that many consider below-standard.

But, again, the story isn't about the product, per se. It's about partnership, collaboration and taking chances. It's also about how important the relationships we develop in this industry are when we need someone to call when you have a crazy idea.

But it’s also about the mark you make.

I asked Susie: How will they know whether Firefly is a success or a failure? And when?

“Success, for me, is that I’ve left a legacy to the industry,” she said. “That they’ll be like, ‘Oh, that’s the crazy chick that brought the glow-in-the-dark plants to the market!’ I operate with a chip on my shoulder. I don’t know if it’s because I’m a woman, I don’t know if it’s because I came up in a family business—probably all of these things. I don’t just want to be Susie Raker of Raker-Roberta’s Young Plants. I want to do something that is mine and mine alone. That’s what drives me every day and I want to leave something to this industry. That’s what my dad, my uncle and my cousin left for this industry; I want to leave something, too, that’s all mine.”

It isn’t about dollars or number of units—although they obviously want to sell a ton. And it isn’t about telling everyone how ambitious they are—although creating a whole new industry category is pretty cool. It’s about challenging yourself, to get out of your comfort zone and to take the risks you feel passionately about.

Even if Firefly ends up being a bust, Susie will still be able to say she made her mark by trying something that others were too risk-adverse to do.

“Every now and then when I’m down on myself or I had a bad day or just got the crap beat out of me, I’m like, ‘You know what, Susie? Nobody else has ever done this either, so it’s okay. It’s okay to make some mistakes as long as we have more wins than losses.’ I’m here for the long game. I’m not here for the short game.”

Will your legacy define you as someone who took risks? Who was fearless, but strategic? That even through failures and mistakes you still kept pushing to try, to be better, to improve?

All of us can only hope that the mark we leave is memorable (in a good way!), inspiring and lasting.

Here’s to working toward that goal! **GT**