

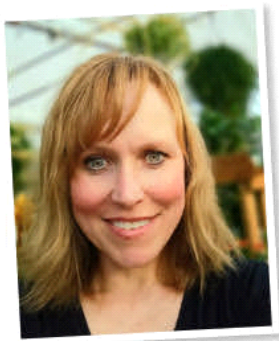
GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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Old Expectations, New Perspectives

Trudy Watt



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Staffing is probably one of the most frustrating parts of my job. Every January and February, I sit down and really think through the best way to staff both the retail and production greenhouses for the season ahead. I want to make sure we're set up to provide great customer service while also keeping production running smoothly. On paper, the plan always feels solid and easy enough to follow.

Then spring hits. Things get busy fast and somehow all that careful planning starts to feel unrealistic. Suddenly, I need people right away, the days are flying by and I've got a pile of resumes waiting for me.

Thankfully, we do have a core group of staff who are the armature of our operation. They're knowledgeable, reliable and know exactly how things run. They bring that experience you just can't train overnight and they help hold everything together during the busiest stretch of the season. Their work ethic is outstanding, and they treat the greenhouses and everything in them like it's their own. They genuinely love plants, are pros when it comes to helping customers and make coming to work enjoyable. That's the standard I'm hoping to build on when hiring new staff—people who support the team, are open to learning and are willing to work hard. Maybe that's a bit optimistic, but it's always my starting point.

When I'm reviewing resumes or sitting down for interviews, I always find myself thinking, "What is this person going to bring to the team?" I look at their skills and education, of course, but just as much at their attitude and personality. Like a lot of seasoned managers, I can usually get a pretty good sense within the first few minutes of meeting someone whether they're going to be a good fit. That's been my approach for years, but I can see it shifting. More and more, applicants are just as focused on what the company can offer them. They care about their personal time, flexible hours and doing work that feels meaningful. I can respect that—it's not unreasonable—but I still have to smile a bit when someone hands me a vacation request on their first day.

It's a seasonal job ... we kind of need you here for the season.

So what changed? I can still remember how fortunate I felt just to have a job in this industry when I was starting out—really, just to have a job at all. My life revolved around work and in many ways it still does. I was willing to work whatever hours were needed and time off barely crossed my mind. Most of my Gen X coworkers shared that same mindset, and we admired each other's resilience and work ethic.

Now I'm starting to realize that some of this may simply come down to a generational shift and it's become one of the biggest influences on how we staff for the season. Younger employees often place a higher value on balance, flexibility and personal time than my generation did. That doesn't make their priorities wrong—just different. Still, adapting to that change, while trying to manage a fast-paced seasonal business, can be a challenge. I find myself caught in the middle sometimes—our older staff can become frustrated with the differences, while our younger staff are still trying to figure out where they fit in. I appreciate the younger generation's starry-eyed view of life, and I try to be patient and accommodating as they find their footing. After all, I was that age once, too.

At the same time, I understand the perspective of our long-time staff, who were raised with a very different idea of work and responsibility. Somewhere between those two viewpoints is where I seem to spend most of my spring. The work can be hard, and our season is intense, but I make a real effort to get to know all of our staff as much as I can. I genuinely appreciate the inclusiveness and social awareness that many of our younger employees bring to the workplace. They often see the world differently than previous generations, and there's value in that perspective.

They also have a lot to teach us when it comes to connecting with their generation as customers. Understanding what appeals to them, how they shop and even how they relate to plants and gardening helps keep our business evolving alongside the people we're trying to reach. They're bright, full of potential and bring an important perspective to the workplace. Their energy, ideas and willingness to look at things differently can be refreshing, and I've come to realize that our team is stronger because of that mix. **GT**

Trudy Watt has a Bachelor's of Horticulture and is a Canadian Accredited Floral Designer. She's worked as an educator, a grower and in retail horticulture for over 30 years. She's most at home in a garden center, connecting people with plants.