

# GROWERTALKS

## Features

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## Stopping the Cycle

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Most operational problems in the green industry aren't mysteries. In fact, the solutions to nearly every inefficiency in organizations are usually already known by the people closest to the work. The crew member loading trucks every morning knows which process wastes 20 minutes per job site. The grower understands where communication gaps create preventable material issues. The garden center associate sees exactly where customer frustration begins during peak weekends. The irrigation technician knows which maintenance shortcuts eventually create callbacks. The shipping team understands where

inventory confusion slows fulfillment. Employees rarely struggle to identify operational friction because they experience it every single day.

Yet many organizations continue searching for answers in management meetings, outside consultants, new software systems or expensive initiatives while overlooking one of the most valuable operational resources already available: the insight of their own employees.

The reality is that most employees already know what's slowing the business down. They know where quality slips and which tasks take longer than necessary because of unclear processes, outdated systems, poor communication, lack of training, insufficient staffing or conflicting priorities. Front-line employees experience which frustrations repeatedly create mistakes, stress and wasted effort. The problem isn't a lack of operational wisdom, but that organizations often fail to consistently access it.

This disconnect creates an expensive cycle inside many businesses where managers grow frustrated because performance stalls, employees become disengaged because recurring problems never improve and operations become increasingly reactive instead of proactive. Over time, teams stop bringing ideas forward because experience teaches them that nothing really changes.

In green industries, this issue becomes magnified because the work moves fast and operational pressure is constant. Spring compresses months of activity into a few intense weeks while staffing shortages force teams to

multi-task—all while customer expectations continue rising and managers are expected to accomplish more with limited labor and tighter margins.

Under pressure, many leaders unintentionally narrow communication instead of expanding it. Conversations become focused on immediate execution to finish the orders, move the product, complete the installs and solve today's emergencies. But when organizations operate entirely in reaction mode, they lose visibility into the deeper operational friction that's draining performance every day.

### **Direct from the source**

The irony is that front-line employees often have remarkably practical solutions. A retail associate may recognize that simple signage adjustments could dramatically reduce repetitive customer questions during busy weekends. A landscape crew may know that reorganizing equipment staging could eliminate unnecessary downtime every morning. A grower may identify that crop issues are occurring because information between departments arrives too late or inconsistently. An operations coordinator may see that one scheduling process creates bottlenecks that ripple throughout the entire week.

There are operational realities observed daily by people doing the work that could solve incredible problems if they were ever extracted by managers.

The organizations that consistently improve performance understand that operational wisdom lives at every level of the company, not just in leadership roles. The best managers recognize that employees aren't simply labor executing tasks, but are active observers of systems, inefficiencies, customer frustrations, workflow breakdowns and quality gaps.

The difference in which organizations get the performance edge is employee engagement. Employees who feel heard and valued are far more likely to share ideas, solve problems proactively and contribute improvements. Meanwhile, employees who believe their opinions don't matter eventually stop volunteering insights altogether.

Unfortunately, many organizations unintentionally train employees not to speak up. When employee suggestions aren't followed up upon and concerns are dismissed, problems become normalized because everyone assumes they're simply "part of the job." Over time, employees stop wasting energy offering ideas that appear unwelcome or ineffective.

The best managers actively work against this pattern by treating employees as operational partners rather than task managers. They create consistent opportunities for employees to discuss obstacles, frustrations, inefficiencies and ideas for improvement. Most importantly, they respond quickly and completely.

Great managerial responses don't require saying yes to every suggestion. Employees understand that budgets, staffing realities and operational constraints exist. What employees want is evidence that their experience matters and that leadership is genuinely paying attention.

A manager who says, "That's not feasible right now, but here's why," builds far more trust than a manager who ignores the issue entirely. Employees are usually willing to adapt when they understand the reasoning behind decisions. Silence, however, creates disengagement because it communicates that operational feedback has little value.

### **Feedback = "Organizational wisdom"**

Many operational issues also persist because managers assume they already understand what employees need. In reality, the perception gap between leadership and front-line teams is often larger than expected.

For example, a manager may believe a crew is under-performing because of urgency or accountability issues, while the crew sees daily inefficiencies caused by disorganized materials, equipment availability problems or unrealistic sequencing expectations. A retail manager may interpret poor customer engagement as attitude problems when associates are actually overwhelmed by broken inventory systems or unclear promotional communication.

One of the simplest, but most powerful, habits managers can build is regularly asking operational questions such as:

- What part of the job slows the team down the most?
- What feels harder than it should right now?
- Where do mistakes or frustrations happen most often?
- If one process could improve tomorrow, what would make the biggest impact?
- What obstacles are getting in the way of quality work?

These conversations frequently uncover operational barriers that leadership would never see from reports or dashboards alone.

Importantly, the best operational cultures don't wait for annual surveys or crisis moments to ask these questions; they make feedback part of normal operations. Small recurring conversations often surface small recurring issues before they evolve into larger performance problems.

Unlocking this feedback is what could be called “organizational wisdom” or the collective operational intelligence of people closest to the work. Businesses that access this wisdom consistently become more adaptable, more efficient and more resilient because problems are identified earlier and solutions emerge faster.

Strong operational cultures also recognize that employees become more invested in outcomes when they help shape improvements. Teams are more likely to support systems they contributed to creating and accountability strengthens because employees feel ownership rather than compliance.

Research consistently shows that employees who feel involved, heard and valued are more engaged at work, and highly engaged teams produce stronger performance outcomes across productivity, retention, profitability and absenteeism. That's because, in operational environments, the employees who believe their voice matters are far more likely to help improve the business itself.

Many organizations spend enormous amounts of money searching for operational breakthroughs while overlooking the fact that much of the insight they need already exists internally. The challenge is building managerial habits and organizational cultures that consistently listen to the people on the front line. Fortunately, that wisdom is only a conversation away from being learned. **GT**

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*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](https://NealGlatt.com).*