

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Providing Purpose

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Every manager wants a team that cares about the work, takes pride in the details and steps up when the season gets difficult. They're the ones that give the kind of effort that can't be demanded into existence, but is earned when employees believe their work matters.

That distinction is especially important in the green industry. Much of the daily work can look repetitive from the outside, whether it's to water another rack, unload another truck, restock another table, pull another order or clean another piece of equipment. During the rush of daily business, the connection between those tasks and

the larger purpose of the business can easily disappear.

When that connection is missing, however, work becomes just a checklist. Employees start measuring the day by how many hours remain rather than by what the team is accomplishing. Managers may respond by pushing harder, repeating instructions or tightening accountability. Those actions may produce short bursts of activity, but they rarely create lasting commitment.

A larger purpose

Inspiration starts when the purpose behind the work becomes clear. A nursery isn't simply moving plant material; it's helping landscapes succeed, supporting contractors and contributing to healthier, more attractive communities. A greenhouse isn't merely filling benches; it's producing the crops that will become someone's first vegetable garden, a family's backyard gathering space or the color that brings customers back to a local garden center. A retailer isn't just scanning products; he or she is helping customers feel confident enough to keep gardening and enjoy the physical and emotional benefits of being outdoors.

That larger purpose may seem obvious to ownership and senior leadership, but it isn't always obvious to the person tagging pots, loading carts or answering the same basic question for the tenth time that afternoon. Managers have to make the connection visible.

This doesn't require a dramatic speech at the beginning of every shift. In fact, purpose is usually communicated best through short, specific conversations tied to real work. When a propagation team improves rooting consistency, the

conversation should include more than percentages and production targets. Better consistency means fewer shortages, more reliable orders and greater confidence for customers. When a retail associate patiently helps a nervous first-time gardener choose the right plants, that interaction is more than good service. It may be the reason that customer succeeds and returns. Those moments shouldn't pass unnoticed.

Recognizing specific “mission moments”

One of the most practical habits a manager can build is recognizing “mission moments,” the ordinary examples of employees bringing the company's purpose to life. A crew member catches a quality problem before material reaches a customer. A cashier walks a heavy purchase to a customer's vehicle without being asked. A grower adjusts a process that reduces losses. A delivery driver takes extra care with an order because the job-site schedule is tight. Recognition should explain not only what happened, but why it mattered.

A quick comment such as, “That extra check protected the customer and the reputation of the whole team,” carries more weight than a generic “good job.” Specific recognition teaches employees what excellence looks like and reinforces the importance of their role.

Team meetings are another opportunity to make work meaningful, but purpose should be connected to the agenda rather than added as a corporate slogan. Before discussing weekend staffing, managers can explain what the customer experience should feel like during the busiest hours. Before reviewing production goals, the team can discuss which customers or departments depend on that crop being ready. Before assigning clean-up work, the manager can connect organization and sanitation to safety, efficiency and crop quality.

The point isn't to make every task sound heroic because employees recognize exaggeration quickly; the goal is to explain the real impact of work that may otherwise feel small or disconnected.

Managers also need to learn what makes the job meaningful to each employee. Purpose is shared across the organization, but personal connections vary. One employee may take pride in growing a consistent crop. Another may enjoy helping customers solve problems. Someone else may value being part of a dependable team that gets difficult work done together.

Regular conversations can uncover those connections. Questions such as, “When does this job feel most important?” or “What part of the work creates the most pride?” often produce more useful information than asking whether an employee likes the job. A manager might also ask about a customer interaction that felt especially rewarding, a team accomplishment worth repeating or a responsibility that feels particularly fulfilling.

The answers reveal what already motivates the employee and also provide clues about how work can be assigned, recognized and developed more effectively.

A shared sense of purpose becomes even stronger when employees help define what the team stands for. A simple team mission statement can provide that focus. It doesn't need polished language or a framed poster. A garden center team might agree that its purpose is to make gardening feel possible for every customer. A shipping team might decide that its role is to send every order out complete, accurate and ready for success. A growing team may focus on producing dependable quality that customers can build their businesses around.

The best statements are short enough to remember and practical enough to guide decisions. When priorities conflict, the team mission should help clarify what matters most.

Celebrating results also helps employees see the larger impact of their work. When a major installation is completed, an important order ships successfully or a strong weekend exceeds expectations, the conversation should go beyond the number. What did the team do that created the result? Which behaviors should become standard practice? How did the outcome help customers, strengthen the business or support coworkers? Connecting performance to impact turns success into a lesson rather than a temporary high.

Inspiring better work isn't about constant cheerleading; it's about helping employees understand that their contribution has meaning, their decisions matter and their daily effort affects people beyond the immediate task. That message must be repeated through conversations, priorities, recognition and leadership behavior.

When purpose becomes part of everyday management, employees are more likely to bring care, judgment and energy to the job. Great managers own the call to inspire their teams to strive for excellent performance daily with meaning. **GT**

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