

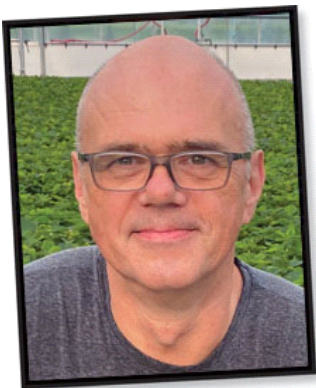
GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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On Curiosity

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Curious people can be so annoying. They ask a lot of questions and then they aren't happy with simple answers. They can be tough on our ego because they challenge our explanations. They often balk at time-honored methods and they loathe knowledge hierarchies. As operators and managers of rank, we aren't used to having our instructions and explanations questioned, and when we're confronted with curious employees, we tend to tell them in very nice words that they get paid to work and not to ask questions. This is where we destroy any chance to build a culture of curiosity.

Why would we want a culture of curiosity? Our industry complains invariably about a shortage of qualified engaged growers, about a lack of competent decision makers, and about indifferent and disinterested staff. I would submit that we're really looking for curiosity when we grumble about poor attitudes towards learning and detail. If we're lucky enough to find someone with curiosity and imagination, we smother these qualities through onboarding with AI-assisted SOPs and standardized training videos. We confine the curious to the trodden paths of workplace routines because we find it too tedious to satisfy their thirst for knowledge and learning.

As more corporate structures creep into our greenhouses, we have less room for creativity and original thinking. This is how we end up with indifferent and disinterested staff. We actively filter out people with natural curiosity when we don't answer questions and don't share information to feed their inquisitive nature. The best of them will leave, and those who cannot afford to leave will resign themselves to indifference.

Creating a culture where curiosity is welcome ought to start at the top. Leadership must foster inquisitiveness and accept it as a chance to make a difference. We must learn to supplant indifference and disinterest with passion and imagination. Fostering genuine interest requires us to view any question, even a challenging one, as an opportunity to explain and teach.

Education has changed since I went to school. My generation was still allowed to explore hands-on in science labs with minimal supervision. It was pure fun to learn how stuff worked, when we could observe and read what we were interested to know instead of gorging ourselves on memorized answers for an upcoming test. I admit that my grades were underwhelming because I never focused on maximizing test scores. What stayed with me, however, was curiosity to make sense of the world. I'm not content to merely know how stuff works; I want to know exactly

WHY it works the way it does.

In time, I discovered that production greenhouses are perfect real-world labs. I've been able to satisfy my desire to understand, without ever running out of questions. This has transformed work from a career path into a lifestyle.

Many operations don't leave much room for the minds of horticultural explorers like me. Instead, credentialism has become the touchstone by which we filter for potential leaders among cohorts of career hopefuls. The education industry is marketing credentials as valid metrics for competence, knowledge and ingenuity, but there's a problem with using them as the sole measuring stick.

I'd like to explain with a paraphrased quote from Ethan Mollick: "If every company is run by the same AI system, then all companies are getting similar results. Nobody has a competitive edge." What is true for AI is also true for credentialism: Both attempt to find perfection by improving applications of existing ideas. This doesn't help when a company wants to develop a critical, if razor-thin, competitive advantage. We still need the curiosity and imagination of those who can think outside the box of standardized knowledge. When it comes to ingenuity, it's the curious leader—not the credentialed one—who stands out.

So be honest: How much room do you make in your days to foster curiosity? How much time do you allow for questions from your staff, when they ask about details of their work? How do you respond when questions don't relate to the task at hand? It's the nature of curious people to ask questions. We need people who thrive on learning and on finding solutions. If we don't allow them the necessary time and support, they'll find other sources of passion and fascination. **GT**

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