

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Creating a Culture of Quality

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Every manager wants a team that cares about doing good work. In the green industry, that commitment shows up like crops that meet shipping specifications, displays that stay clean and shoppable, orders that leave accurately and on time, equipment that gets maintained properly, customers who receive consistent service, and landscapes that look right when the crew pulls away. The challenge is that quality cannot be carried by one or two conscientious employees—it has to become a team expectation.

This is particularly important not only for customers, but because employees pay close attention to the effort and standards of the people working around them. According to Gallup, only about one in three employees strongly agrees that coworkers are committed to doing quality work. When employees believe even one person on the team isn't pitching in, that number drops to roughly one in five. That makes quality more than a production issue, but also an employee engagement issue.

Setting expectations early

Consider a greenhouse team trying to get an order ready during the spring rush. Most of the crew are checking tags, cleaning plants, confirming quantities and making sure carts are built correctly. One employee regularly skips steps because someone else will probably catch the mistakes. Eventually, the strongest employees notice. At first, they may quietly fix the problems. Then they start wondering why the extra effort always seems to fall on them. The problem gets worse when the manager sees the pattern and does nothing.

Gallup notes that people are six times more upset with a coworker who has the ability, but doesn't try than with someone who tries hard, but lacks ability. That reaction makes sense because skills can be coached and experienced can be developed, but watching capable employees consistently give less effort while others carry the load quickly erodes trust.

Unfortunately, this often leads to the lowest acceptable performance on a team becoming the real standard. A manager can talk all day about excellence, but employees are watching what actually gets tolerated.

Creating a culture of quality starts by defining what quality means in practical terms. "Do good work," "Take care of

the customer” and “Keep the area looking good” aren’t standards because those phrases leave too much room for interpretation.

A better approach is to outline quality expectations for important tasks and functions. For a shipping team, that might mean correct quantities, accurate labeling, clean product and secure loads. For a garden center, quality might include healthy displays, accurate plant information and customers being acknowledged promptly. For a landscape crew, it could include clean edges, complete cleanup, properly maintained equipment and a final walkthrough before leaving the property.

Once expectations are specific, managers can start coaching against something employees can see. Those standards also need to be established early. New employees quickly learn what a team truly values by watching coworkers and supervisors. If shortcuts are ignored during the first few weeks, those shortcuts soon become normal. If quality is discussed during onboarding, demonstrated by experienced employees and reinforced consistently, a very different message is sent.

Regular conversations also help keep that standard alive. Managers can ask employees how the team knows when good work has been completed, what gets in the way of quality, where mistakes tend to happen and what could improve the process. Another useful question is simply, “What does quality look like in this role?”

Team meetings can also be used to share examples of quality. An employee might explain a better way to stage orders before loading. A grower might demonstrate a more consistent scouting process. A retail associate might show how a merchandising reset improved presentation and reduced customer confusion. These conversations turn quality from a manager’s instruction into something the entire team helps define and protect.

Co-worker and supervisor guidance

Peer recognition can strengthen that message even further. Teams can be encouraged to point out when coworkers step up, solve problems or protect standards. That matters because a quality culture is strongest when employees feel comfortable holding one another accountable rather than relying on the manager to police every detail.

That doesn’t mean turning coworkers into supervisors, but rather creating enough trust that an employee can say, “That doesn’t look right” or “This step got missed” without creating unnecessary conflict. Gallup describes team commitment to quality as an environment where people feel comfortable questioning, confronting and remaining vigilant about doing what’s right.

Managers also need a dependable way for employees to raise concerns when someone repeatedly fails to meet standards. Those conversations should never become a gossip channel—the goal is to identify legitimate performance problems before resentment spreads across the team.

Finally, managers have to model the same standards expected from everyone else. A supervisor who ignores details, leaves unfinished work for others or routinely takes shortcuts sends a much stronger message than any quality poster hanging in the breakroom. Teams take cues from what leaders consistently do.

A culture of quality is ultimately built through three levels of commitment: An organization that makes quality a real priority, individuals who take responsibility for their own work and teams that protect standards together. Over time, those habits create something far more than just compliance—they create pride. And when employees are proud of the work carrying their name, quality stops being something the manager has to constantly demand and simply becomes the way the team operates. **GT**

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).