

GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

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Status Quo vs. Growth Mindset

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Spend enough time inside greenhouse and nursery operations, and you start noticing the same pattern almost everywhere you go, no matter the size of the place or how the business got started. Somewhere inside every operation that's been running longer than a decade, there's a way of doing things that nobody remembers choosing. It got built one reasonable decision at a time, by good people solving real problems, and at some point it became "how things are done here." It became status quo.

None of that is a knock on the people running those operations. Most of what becomes "the way we've always done it" earned that status honestly. It worked. It solved a real problem at the time. And it kept solving it well enough that nobody had a reason to look at it twice. However, somewhere down the line, "What if we were to ...?" or "Why do we ...?" never got asked or was shot down enough times it stopped being asked at all.

Growth mindset gets used loosely enough in business writing that it's started to sound like something you'd see on a poster in a breakroom with a picturesque mountain (if you're over 35 you know the posters I'm visualizing). Strip that away and it's a plain question: Are you willing to look at something that's worked for years, something you might have built yourself, and ask honestly whether it still fits the business you have today? The examination that ticks in the back of your brain while you're driving home, the constant nagging of habitual learning and understanding—that's what creates growth.

The place this shows up most, in my experience, is exactly where a business starts bringing in new people to carry weight the owners used to carry themselves. A system built by one or two people, refined by instinct and intuition over years, works beautifully as long as those same one or two people keep running it. The moment a business tries to hand pieces of that system to somebody new, gaps show up that were always there, simply never visible before, because the people who built the system never needed anyone to explain it to them.

I used to ask the probing question, "If that person hits the jackpot, flies to Jamaica and never comes back, what would you do? How would that person learn? How long would it take for them to reach the same level of competence?" It's a hard question that often gives me blank stares and "we would be up a creek" responses.

I've seen it take a lot of different shapes. An inventory process that lives entirely in one person's memory. A pricing sheet built for a market that stopped existing years ago. A training approach that amounts to standing next to somebody long enough that they eventually absorb it. None of these things are failures on their own.

They're simply what happens when a business runs well enough, for long enough, that nobody stops to ask whether the reasoning behind them still holds up.

I want to be careful here because the wrong version of this idea does real damage. Growth mindset doesn't mean chasing every new piece of software or management trend that shows up at a trade show, and it doesn't mean treating decades of hard-earned experience like it's worthless simply because it's old. The operators who've been doing this for 20 or 30 years know things no consultant (myself included) is going to teach them. The question was never whether that experience matters; it's whether it's still being examined or whether it's only being repeated.

A fair way to find out where you stand is to pick one thing your operation has done the same way for five years or more. It doesn't matter what. Ask honestly whether you could explain to a brand new employee exactly WHY it's done that way, beyond "that's how we've always done it." If the reasoning still holds up once you say it out loud, you're not looking at status quo. You're looking at something that earned its place. If it doesn't, you've found something worth a second look. (Note that I didn't say HOW things are done—that's where SOPs live.)

This matters beyond any one process getting modernized. A business that runs entirely on unspoken instinct has a ceiling built into it, whether anyone intends that or not. Every employee coming up through an operation like that eventually hits a point where they can execute a task perfectly and still can't make the call because nobody ever taught them how the call gets made. Examining the way you've always done things isn't only about protecting the business. It's about making sure the people you're bringing up behind you have something real to learn, not only something to copy.

None of this asks an operator to abandon what got them here; it asks them to say it out loud. The knowledge that took you decades to build is worth more once somebody else can carry it, too, and the operations that keep growing tend to be the ones willing to keep asking whether the way they do things still deserves to be the way they do things long after it stopped being a question anyone thought to ask. **GT**

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