

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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Bridge Building

Gary Mangum



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You will never lose ground by building a bridge.

—Don Carmont

In business and in life we spend a great deal of time competing—trying to earn a larger market share, create the highest quality service or products, win an argument, or simply create something most unique.

Embarking on most any mission can generally be easier if we plan and work with, not against, people and organizations that may have differing viewpoints. First to mind is the discussion about pollinators nationally and internationally that initially moved some of us to dig in and adopt a “don’t engage” posture. That’s where I personally started before thinking about things from different perspectives. I’m fairly certain if growers had adopted that “fight-at-all-cost” position long term, we would have been in the unenviable place today of being at cross purposes with our customers, whether big box or independents. By extension, many of their customers may have fled our spring planting rituals.

Instead, most of us are working together to reach common goals, and with the help of AmericanHort and many other pollinator-friendly organizations, we’re helping to create Monarch butterfly feeding stations along their migratory paths, new venues and awareness for the birds and bees, and more deliberate thought around sustainable practices in our businesses.

A new, high-powered perennial has found amazing consumer awareness after essentially a single year of trials thanks to some forward-thinking growers working to build bridges through such diverse channels as garden clubs and environmental watchdog groups. Enthusiasm around the common milkweed has been featured on the cover of national magazines with much more positive publicity to come for pollinator-friendly plants. The engaging cover of *Green Profit* magazine last month stimulated much conversation in our office about the plight of the Monarch butterfly. We’re proud to be working with innovators that were driving

discussions on the topic as “bridge builders.” Working together, in what could have been a very negative scenario, ends up being the catalyst to develop mutually beneficial dialogue and outcomes.

As we think about situational challenges that could cause us angst as business operators or employees, we must immediately go to that place of working together to get things sorted out for the common good.

Sometimes venturing into uncomfortable territory can reap great rewards. As some know, in my older age I've become more politically engaged and have observed a Republican governor in a very Democrat-controlled state tackle some big issues and accomplish numerous goals in a few short years. Our governor hasn't progressed his agenda by name calling; instead he has been the classic bridge builder, figuratively and literally, as he learned early in his administration that there were nearly a hundred bridges in Maryland that were structurally deficient. Without a single tax increase, things were quickly reordered so that crucial infrastructure could be immediately addressed. The credibility earned quickly to invest in infrastructure influenced his favorability in a way that moved him from 68% to 74% among all registered voters. At the same time, tolls across the state were cut to the lowest level in 50 years.

Much of his success and popularity is based on his common sense, bipartisan approach and his ability to work with those on the “other side” of issues. Finding common ground in challenging situations has helped move our state forward—and it's a model that can be used in all facets of business, politics and life.

We encourage employees to “act like you own it” in every possible opportunity. Make decisions as if the business were yours. Recently, an individual in one of the Home Depot locations we serve shared her experience of making a series of suggestions that were, at first, not well received. She went on to explain that in her country of Nigeria she learned an old saying that has influenced her decisions as long as she could remember: “In the moment of crisis, the wise build bridges and the foolish build dams.”

If we all spent more time and resources on building consensus, instead of fighting against opposing viewpoints, we could meet our mutual goals and feel our very best as we say, “Mission accomplished.” **GT**

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