

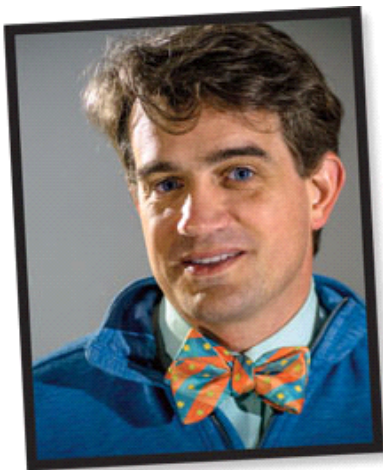
GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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Crank Up the Heat

Art Parkerson



ART PARKERSON

Think like a plant. Grow like a plant. For 10 months out of the year, this is sound advice, especially for manufacturers. That should make you feel good. You understand how plants grow, therefore, you already know all you need to know about business ... if only you can see how to apply that knowledge!

Seeding, watering, planting, weeding and pruning—these aren't just cultural practices, they're business practices. Consider light, substrate, temperature and nutrients—your product is a parable. You could teach Fortune 500 executives what you know and they would marvel at your insight.

We all do the same exact things—whether growing crops or running businesses—the difference is that some do it better than others. Much of that difference can be summarized with three words: timing, consistency and accuracy. If you do the right thing at the right time in the right amount every

single time ... you really can't lose.

The best growers I know have a lot of experience. They keep detailed notes about what they've done in the past, but they have something even more important: they can listen to what the plants tell them. Great growers say things like, "The plants will tell you when they're hungry." It's almost like the plant, not the plan, is the one in charge. The same is true for great businesspeople. Sure, they watch the numbers—they know the metrics and the balances, the margins and the ratios—all that stuff your accountant confuses you with. But great businesspeople also watch and listen. Much like a grower, they might say, "The business will tell you when it's hungry."

You might do well to pretend, if only just for fun, "What if a plant were my CEO?"

But not in the winter. Oh, no, you have no business emulating a plant in winter. With plants, dormancy is not decay. Not so in business. If your company goes dormant, you might as well be a doormat. Expunge the phrases "off season," "downtime" and "slow period" from your workplace. Let your competitors take a break. Let some other loser rest on his laurels.

You don't need to shut down to survive until conditions are just right for you to thrive. What you do when there's nothing to do will have the greatest impact on what happens when there's too much to do. So what are you supposed to be doing?

Your production plan is already set—you made that back in September. It's too early to recruit and hire, isn't it? How

many times can you paint the wagons, wax the floors and change the oil?

Now's the time to re-imagine your business. Does your production plan match your business plan? Maybe it's too late to change it, but maybe not. Do you have the right people doing the right things? How can you put your very best performers in spots where they can have the biggest impact? You don't want your fire-starters putting out fires all spring.

Consider yourself—you know that you have good days and bad. When everything clicks—when you're in alpha mode—you get more done in an hour than you do in a week. What are you going to do this year to make sure you're at your best more often? Maybe you tell people that you've embraced Lean Flow, but have you really? Do you really understand the principles?

And should we talk about your marketing? Boy, that needs some work. What are you going to do about Amazon? When are you going to get around to evaluating new computer systems? You could spend a whole winter doing nothing but killing spreadsheets—too often they're internment camps for business data, not the incubators you imagine them to be. Seriously, when are you ever going to use all that data you collect? And what about your customers? You need to find more. That doesn't just happen by accident.

You know all of this; you feel it. You know what you need to do, but knowing doesn't make it easy. When it's dark and cold it's hard to feel the energy. When the cash register is silent, when customers seem sleepy, when employees are weary, it's all too easy to slip into hibernation.

Don't let that happen. Wake up! You have to be your own boiler. The heat—the energy—you require isn't going to come from any external source. This is hard, but you were made for this. Listen, this is your calling. Fire up the boiler! Keep her stoked. Believe it: you can energize your organization and this is the perfect time to do it.

The seeds you sow right now—yes, even today—will surely bloom and bear fruit when you need it most. This is the wrong time to take a break! Imagine if your business ran so well you could take a vacation in the spring. As fanciful as that sounds, make it your goal. You may never achieve it, but you'll be better just for dreaming it.

The only place to start is to energize yourself. It's a decision. It's your choice. Plants can't energize themselves. They can't make their own sunlight. They can't change the temperature, but you can. You control the thermostat, so crank up the heat. Go ahead and grow like a plant all year long, but please ... not in the winter. **GT**

Art Parkerson lives and works at Lancaster Farms, a wholesale nursery in Suffolk, Virginia. To say hello, write to art@lancasterfarms.com.