

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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The Job Market

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Why can't we find enough qualified growers? Are we not reaching the right people with our job offers? Are we advertising our jobs in the wrong media? Or should we be asking ourselves whether the concept of marketing jobs has gone off the rails?

In all seriousness, what can we expect when "the job market" moves into the realm of social media and advertises "Fresh Jobs for Wednesdays"? If I was a few years younger, I would probably not consider a career that pushes job offerings with a pitch reminiscent of hawkers peddling cheap merchandise at a market stall.

In our world of rapid-cycle merchandise, we may accept that product longevity is no longer a factor for purchase decisions, but it's treacherous to allow the same quick-turn mentality to creep into our rationale for career decisions. Our workplaces desperately need commitment to build experience, but expertise cannot be bought or sold. It can only be accumulated. Genuine competency has market value, but it needs time to develop. It requires perseverance and a lifelong horizon for continued learning.

It's too easy to brush off our modern indifference towards long-term learning as a "Millennial thing" and thus surrender horticulture to the fringes of our daily serving of junk email. We're not going to inspire Millennials to commit themselves to the perseverance necessary for meaningful, experience-based careers in the greenhouse industry if we reduce our horticultural vocation to a mere list of job opportunities. The online marketplace is a realm where countless limited-time bargains are pushed onto exasperated consumers and it's the wrong platform to foster career development.

Even Millennials appear to be sensitive to the futility of career marketing, if we consider the ubiquitous online self-help tutorials in which Millennials are trying to prepare other Millennials for the headwinds of existence. Life-long learning isn't an outdated concept, but it's being drowned out by the noise and impatience of what we call the labor market.

It's neither in the interest of employers nor career-seekers that aggressive job marketing should become the norm. In this social media age, it runs the risk of creating indifference towards anything that goes beyond polished point-of-purchase presentations. It makes it all but impossible to communicate the value of professional substance and depth. Neither the givers nor the takers get close to what they're looking for in this marketplace and they're forced to settle for the shiniest package at the cheapest asking price.

I feel fortunate that I've always been compelled to rebel against such herd mentality. A degree of autonomy in my work is very important for me. It gives me a sense of professional and personal freedom, which I cherish. Autonomy in a career doesn't require self-employment or entrepreneurship, but it does demand commitment to a vocation independent of the expectations from a job that we happen to hold at any time. We must define who we want to be in our professional lives, rather than crafting our professional self-image to match fashionable trends in the job market. We must seek independence from the whims of short-term changes and concentrate on a cohesive long-term model for developing our knowledge and skills.

I would propose that we need a paradigm shift in our perspective toward work, where employed professionals regard themselves as business partners who sell a service, not merely time, and where employers place longevity of employment and expectation of professional development at the core of their recruiting and hiring decisions. This would benefit everybody.

Consistency and adaptability create mutually beneficial long-term business relationships. Better quality of service justifies a higher asking price. Competition creates pressure for professionals to improve the scope and quality of the service, and for workplaces to improve the environment for learning and exploration. Such competition is important and healthy because it challenges us to improve benchmarks for excellence in our industry. Therein would we find the incentive for life-long learning: the awareness that knowledge and experience are an asset class worthy of investment. **GT**

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