

GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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Listen to Your “Soul Clock”

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Back in October, I had the chance to attend a few sessions during *Fast Company*'s Innovation Festival. The business publication has been holding its annual Innovation Festival since 2015 and last year, as with a lot of events, it was held virtually. Typically, it's held in New York and tickets are expensive, but since it was all going to be online this year, they offered a few of the keynotes for free.

If you've never heard of *Fast Company*'s Innovation Festival, it's a multi-day event that includes networking and educational sessions, panel discussions and workshops with a focus on business, technology, design and entertainment. And they get some pretty big names for this event—the inaugural year had Serena Williams, Gwyneth Paltrow and Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson in their speaker lineup.

The free keynote addresses for the 2020 event included Robert Downey, Jr., Malala Yousafzai (a personal hero of mine and my daughter's),

Joanna & Chip Gaines, and Janelle Monáe.

Ms. Monáe's session was a one-on-one conversation with *Fast Company* writer KC Ifeanyi rather than a typical keynote. It was wide-ranging—the discussion touched on many topics, from her creativity and art as a musician and actor, to her philanthropy, activism and business acumen.

She was considered an “indie artist” for a long time and really had to work hard to get noticed. But all that hard work paid off. Since she was signed to a major record deal in 2008, Ms. Monáe has been nominated for eight Grammys. When she jumped into acting, she won a Screen Actor's Guild Award for “Hidden Figures” and was nominated for “Moonlight.” You see her everywhere now, in movies, TV shows and commercials. And she's the CEO of her own record label. She's a smart businesswoman.

Some of Ms. Monáe's insights come to mind as we enter into a new year filled with uncertainty about what we can expect. Whenever she's faced with a tough business decision or bombarded with project requests, she says she puts trust in her “soul clock.”

“I know when it's time to do something. And I'm not feeling the pressure to say yes to everything, even if it shows up on my plate. We have to protect the things that make us and our companies unique.”

As you enter your busy production time during a pandemic that's still a part of our everyday lives and trying to navigate expectations for a spring season you have no control over, I hope that you can trust your "soul clock" (or gut or intuition or whatever you call it) to help you keep moving forward. And that's what a lot of this issue is all about—a look ahead.

First, the cover story from friend and media expert Dr. Brian Jackson of NC State University takes a look at how the substrate sector was affected by COVID-19 and what we could be seeing as future options for soilless media.

But we also have some nuggets of wisdom from a few industry thought leaders. I asked Ag Economist Dr. Charlie Hall to give me his impression on what the myriad data he consults with tells him about what we can expect for 2021. (Hint: I've known Charlie for over 10 years and I've never seen him as stumped as he is right now.)

As far as looking ahead at industry legislative priorities, I asked AmericanHort's Executive VP of Government Relations Craig Regelbrugge for a quick take on what their focus will be with a new administration on Capitol Hill.

For this month's column, Bossman Beytes consulted with two people who say we should just relax and be optimistic for this year.

And contributor and owner of Metrolina Greenhouses Abe VanWingerden says 2021 is "an inflection point" for our industry. We should be taking advantage of all the opportunities a good 2020 provided many operations in spite of a raging pandemic.

At one point in the conversation with *Fast Company*, Janelle Monáe said, "I'm always trying to find my balance. I'm always on a search to discover new corners of myself. Growth is painful, but it can be healing."

I hope that your "soul clock" gives you some supportive guidance while also providing a way to find your own balance during this year's busy season. **GT**