

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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Sweat the Small Stuff

Art Parkerson

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I appreciate what you're doing for the company...even though I know in many ways your heart is elsewhere.

Successful people often give bad advice. They offer helpful tips they wouldn't follow themselves.

"Don't sweat the small stuff," they say. "Nobody bats a thousand."

It sounds good. It's encouraging. The problem with bad advice is that sometimes it's good advice. At the right moment to the right person, it's the perfect thing to say. When you see an employee fretting over unimportant details—and not getting the work done—go ahead and remind them that

the first priority is to ship.

But most of the time? We need to care more about what we're shipping. (And how we invoice it, pack it, load it, price it, market it, advertise it, water it, space it, move it and protect it.) There are moments when success comes only by letting go, but the foundation of success is built on close attention to many details.

It may be better to watch successful people than to listen to them. They might say, "Don't sweat the small stuff," but they've spent their lives perspiring. Perhaps the difference lies in what a reasonable person thinks is "small stuff."

This summer, one of my most valuable employees enthused, "Our managers are so happy with how you've handled everything. You don't panic; you don't get angry or lose your temper. It gives us confidence and we feel free to do our jobs. We aren't afraid of what's next."

There's as much warning as there is praise in feedback like this. Temperament isn't the same as mentality, but they're easily mistaken for each other. Personality doesn't equal character. The way something feels doesn't necessarily determine the way that thing performs. I want my socks to be soft and cozy ... but also strong and supportive. I want my company to be calm, peaceable and full of grace ... but we must also strive for excellence.

Everyone needs correction. Your young managers need it. Your most experienced employees need it. You need it. Everything needs pruning. Good growth isn't all sunshine, water and fertilizer. You know when to prune. You know how often to prune. You know how deep to cut. You're a grower.

We've all gone through an extended period of growth. It hasn't exactly been the healthiest growth, however. We've had to make-do, adapt and let things play out. You've done more than socially distance; you've kept your distance, literally and figuratively. There hasn't been the time or opportunity for intimacy with employees, customers or vendors. You've done the only thing you could do: react. You enjoyed the chaos with as much grace as you could muster. You've learned that you can't control all the things you thought you could control a year ago. And it turns out,

maybe you don't need to have that control. It was simply an illusion.

But what happens next?

You're a grower, so you already know the answer. Everything needs pruning. Everything needs weeding. You've let things grow; don't let it grow wild.

A couple weeks ago, I received a text: "I appreciate what you're doing for the company ... even though I know in many ways your heart is elsewhere." My interpretation: You've led the company through thick and thin and you've done an admirable job balancing the responsibilities you have to employees, customers and suppliers, but you're letting things slip that you shouldn't let slip.

The way a thing feels doesn't necessarily define the way it performs, but it usually does. Emotional distancing and calm "everything-will-be-okay" leadership can lead some to wonder about your devotion.

Why haven't you pruned? Why haven't you weeded? (I'm talking about people and processes here, not plants.) You must not be paying attention! And if you aren't paying attention, then you must not truly care.

In 2020, it was good advice to say, "Don't sweat the small stuff," and "Keep a safe distance." Soon, the better advice will be, "Sweat the small stuff" and "Get up close and personal."

You're the grower. You're the leader. You'll know what to do and when. You know where your heart is, so do what you're called to do well. Do it with love! **GT**

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