

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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Basic Driving

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My sales manager, Jason, said to me, “I learned the key to business yesterday teaching my 15-year-old son to drive.”

I was skeptical. For one thing, I don’t think there’s one key to business. You’ve heard the slogans: Buy low, sell high. Who moved my cheese? Know your value proposition. What goes up must come down. Good is the enemy of great. Zig when others zag. Culture eats strategy for lunch.

For us growers, “green side up” or “you reap what you sow” might suffice. All are useful ideas, but none are complete guides. We shouldn’t over-complicate our business, but we shouldn’t over-simplify it either.

For another thing, Jason is great at what he does, but he’s not exactly an oracle like Warren Buffet or anything. He’s a regular guy. Well, better than a regular guy—I trust Jason to manage half of my business. His job is to sell

everything we grow. I respect his insight and ability. I enjoy his company. I appreciate his practical wisdom. But could he have discovered “the key to business”? That’s my job, isn’t it? I’m the one who writes business articles around here!

“What’s that, Jason?” I said. “Best leave the driving to the professionals?”

Jason is one of the most competent drivers I know. His first job for us was as a truck driver. I’ve seen him perform miracles behind the wheel. Once, during a blizzard, I saw him thread his way through several vehicles spinning out at high speeds on an interstate highway. In the blink of an eye, he probably saved four lives that day.

The man knows how to drive.

“Nobody is born a professional,” he said. “Everybody has to learn how to drive.”

I nodded.

Jason continued, “Every time my son goes into a turn, he jerks the wheel like he’s only looking a few feet ahead. I’m like, ‘Not so sharp!’ And so he jerks back the other way. Every single turn is like five or six zig-zags ... all at top speed, of course!”

“So the key is to slow down?” I asked.

"I guess that wouldn't hurt, but the key is to look further down the road," he said. "Aim for the apex of the turn. Business is a winding road. There are very few straight sections that allow you to sit back and cruise. Change is constant. You gotta focus at the right distance. Not too close, but not too far ahead, either. Otherwise, you'll be all over the road and probably end up in a ditch."

I'm very glad I have people like Jason to steer my business for me. I think we're all very curious about what the road ahead will look like. What turns are coming? Should we be aggressive? How much should we plant? Is it time to expand? (If you can find pots, people and plants, that is!)

I've been thinking about what Jason learned from driving with his son because right now I feel like I'm supposed to be a fortune teller, but I can't see the future. I don't know if we'll have hyperinflation or a stock market crash. I don't know if 2022 will be more like 2019 or 2020. Your guess is as good as mine.

My advice to me, and to you, is to simply keep your eyes on the road ahead. **GT**

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