

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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Growth & Gratitude

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I was not far along into my first year on the job in the horticulture industry. Aside from practical experiences in university, this assistant grower gig was my first dip into working and applying what I'd learned. I'd been given responsibility over an outdoor section of container conifers on the nursery here at Qualitree ... and I had messed up.

I made a bad call in prioritizing irrigation schedules. As a result, two beds of Picea plants, numbered "35/36E," dried down too far and got directional sunburn. I'd walked out to this location with Riana, my-ever-patient mentor, to show her and face the music.

If you looked at these plants from the east, they looked swell! From the west ... haggard, brown and beginning to defoliate.

This is what we stared at while we discussed. I was mortified and ready for the consequences. "How can we fix this? What can we learn from this?" Those unexpected words will stick with me forever. Instead of dwelling on the mistake, the focus shifted entirely to improvement.

I walked into that space filled with dread and walked away with gratitude, eagerness and a better irrigation strategy. That was a very short three years ago, a blip in time that has folded within it many changes. However, it continues to stand out to me as the moment I realized that I'd planted my feet in a business that prioritizes not just the growth of their product, but their people.

Over these three years, a new greenhouse/warehouse facility has been raised in two phases, a reservoir system installed and several outdoor Erfgoed fields completed. Old, smaller greenhouses that once housed all of our propagation have been dismantled and even repurposed. Even as I write this, I hear the construction outside the grower office. Several projects are currently underway on the nursery. We're adding additional warehouse space, as well as placing more on-site worker housing.

Additionally, even more of our older outdoor container locations are rapidly renovating into Erfgoed fields. We're also completely changing our location names and layout. Even as construction of new infrastructure is afoot, planning continues for future projects, always thinking, "What's next?"

But as exciting as it is to look forward, we also enjoy stopping a moment to peer back. Part of this recent construction meant taking down the old potting shed. As it was ripped down, ownership and coworkers shared their memories from working in that space. Some stories were from more than 20 years ago, recollections of working among friends and family during the early days of Qualitree. I don't have that kind of tenure, and no similar ties to that building, but I felt that wave of nostalgia when we recently emptied out beds 35/36E. It's now bare and levelled for the

next phase of Erfgoed fields. The old location will cease to exist as it becomes part of an entirely new layout, and I'll miss stopping at those beds and telling that story to whoever will listen.

I'm eager to see the progress three years from now. Not only in the landscape of this nursery and industry, but the people within it. As we grow, new roles are developing and with them new faces arrive to join the team. Inevitably, mistakes will happen and I'm confident that there will be more conversations like the one I shared with Riana. I'm certain everyone has their own version of 35/36E.

Next time you're presented with a mistake, consider it an opportunity. Will you inspire improvement and growth? **GT**

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