

GROWERTALKS

Acres & Acres

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Me? A Titan?

Chris Beytes



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For about 90 minutes in early August, I was deemed to be a “titan” of horticulture and sat alongside three true titans—Dave Daley, CEO and President of BFG Supply; Keith Cable, President of Dümmen Orange North America; and Mark Schermer, Global Head of Syngenta Flowers—for a panel discussion during Plantpeddler’s annual Variety Days.

Normally, I ask the questions, not answer them. However, I’m no stranger to the stage and I think I held my own with these smart guys in spite of our obvious differences (my casual khakis and polo shirt vs. their executive dark slacks and button-downs).

I won’t try to report the other guys’ answers here because I might distort their messages (it’s hard to take notes while on stage). Suffice it to say that all three are experts in supply chain management and logistics, and all three

agree it’s going to be a while before distribution and availability get back to normal. Young plants can be ramped up more quickly than products containing plastic or coming from overseas. Prices will continue to be based on supply and demand. And labor is only going to get more scarce and more expensive, so you’d better find ways to automate or be more efficient.

Being a reporter of our industry and not a captain of it like the other gents, I focused my answers on the practical—what I’ve seen working since the early ’80s when I got my start. Here are some examples, including some quotes that I hoped would stick with the audience.

On how long the good times will last: All the smartest businesspeople I know are planning to be up in 2022. They aren’t hoping to be up—after all, like they say, “Hope is not a strategy”—they are planning on growth based on a careful analysis of their market, their sales for 2020 and 2021, and their customers’ plans for growth. One thing is for certain: If you plan on being down in 2022, you will be.

On raising prices: Do not make the mistake of setting your prices based on your competition. You don’t have a clue what their production costs are. Price based upon how much you need to make to cover all your costs and have some jingle in your pocket at the end of the year. If you think your customers will balk, well, if nobody is complaining about your prices, then they’re too low. And second, make sure your quality and service are so good, they won’t mind paying your price.

On labor and the next generation: We have to catch ’em when they’re young. Not in high school, but grade

school. Give plants to kids, to their schools. Give them tours. Let them try a few hours of “work.” To a 6- or 8-year-old, potting plants is a great adventure. You might just plant a seed that turns into a career. (Mike Gooder then told the audience that Plantpeddler is the result of a milk carton of marigolds he grew in kindergarten.)

On coping with shortages: It’s all about relationships. I told the audience, “If Plantpeddler called you and said, ‘I’m sorry, but we can’t get you those begonias you ordered,’ you’d ask to speak to Mike and you’d say, ‘Mike, buddy, remember how I drove all that way to come to your open house and supported you and Rachel and son John. Come on, old friend, I really need those begonias!’ And Mike would find them for you. Wouldn’t you, Mike?” I asked, turning the attention on him. He smiled and agreed he’d try. Those with strong relationships with vendors, customers and even competitors fared better in the pandemic than those going it alone.

On the industry 10 years from now: I can’t tell you what it will look like—nobody knows what will have changed. But I can tell you what will NOT change: Customers will still want information. They’ll still want inspiration. And they’ll still want quality—quality products and quality services. I can guarantee that quality will still be a rare commodity and an untapped niche 10 years from now. **GT**