

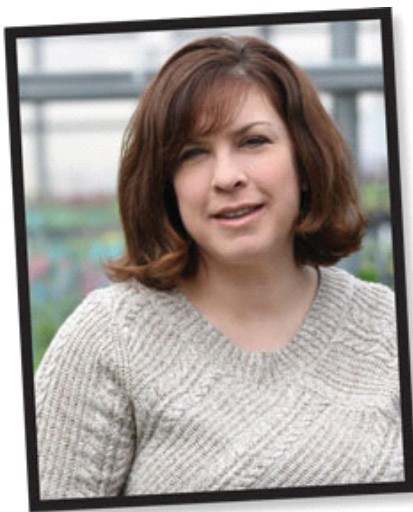
GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

12/1/2021

Marshall, the Not-So-Mysterious Man

Jennifer Zurko



JENNIFER ZURKO

You may know who Marshall Dirks is, may have seen him speak or read about him, but I think very few people really know him. I've known Marshall for over 12 years, but I couldn't say I really knew a lot about him. I mean, I knew he was married, had kids, went to church, attended the same college as me (Go Huskies!), but I've never had the pleasure of sitting down with him over coffee or dinner to really find out what makes him tick.

And I think that's because Marshall is always on the go. He never sits still long enough to have that lengthy conversation. It's probably because every time I see him it's at an industry event or a scheduled business meeting, which rarely lends enough time for extraneous conversations.

So I was really looking forward to sitting down with him for this month's cover story. This is the seventh year that our December issue pays homage to *Fast Company*, where we profile an industry professional who exemplifies stellar business acumen or marketing expertise. We usually

brainstorm candidates beforehand, throwing out names of who we think would be cover story-worthy. Chris brought up Marshall and I thought he would make for an interesting subject—not just because we could all learn how the Proven Winners marketing sausage is made, but because we really just wanted to know more about Marshall. Who is he? Where does he get his ideas? How did he learn to be a great marketer?

It turns out that Marshall Dirks isn't much of a mystery at all. If you really want to know something about him, you could ask and he would tell you. And the inspiration of where and how he finds his ideas to promote the Proven Winners brand is actually really simple.

Those who do know him, like Jim Peterson with Garden Design magazine, describe him as a person with "bottomless passion," who's "enthusiastic and appreciative."

"Marshall listens and takes in new ideas, as well as tries new things so he can put them to the test," said Jim. "No moss grows around Marshall. When he decides to do something, he likes to get it moving right away."

Mark Broxon, Proven Winners' Executive Director, said, "There is no doubt that Proven Winners would not be where we are today without Marshall Dirks. [He] creates opportunities because he loves the Proven Winners brand and he loves serving our customers. He does things that others would not do. Marshall brings vision, passion, leadership, great ideas and an unbelievable work ethic to our brand."

After sitting with Marshall for over two hours, I learned that he's humble enough to admit when he doesn't know how to do something, he's confident enough to try almost any idea and he's got enough drive to lead a productive team. There's really no secret recipe to being a gracious, motivated and passionate person, but not everybody can make the cake.

Also with this issue is our annual Wage & Benefit Survey, which is in its 26th year. Every year tells a different story centered around labor and this time it's about the increase in hourly wages for general and seasonal labor.

We also have features on other business-y type topics, like succession planning where there is no succession plan and how to get tax breaks on your labor costs. Plus, we've got great stuff from our columnists—Paul Pilon is coming back to what got him into horticulture in the first place, Austin Bryant talks about how hard the supply chain issues have been for hardgoods, and Art Parkerson warns you not to be fooled by the mountain of cash you're currently sitting on.

Lastly, I'd like to wish you and your family a joyous holiday season. Hopefully, it's much closer to normal than last year's was. **GT**