

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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Lessons From Stepping Back

Terri McEnaney



TERRI MCENANEY

(Editor's note: I'm so excited to welcome Terri to our contributing staff and look forward to all of the insights she'll be sharing with our readers.—JZ)

When asked to be a contributing columnist, I must admit I was a bit apprehensive. I've worked at our family business most of my life and have gone from cleaning bathrooms to planting cuttings to leading board meetings. Whether in roles past or present, now as Chief Executive Officer of Bailey Nurseries, I've been very fortunate to be a part of this wonderful industry where we beautify the outdoor living experience and are energized by growing what's next.

There's a natural tendency to feel discouraged after a softening in the market following our industry's arguably best year ever, but the power of positive thinking can widen our attention and receptiveness to new possibilities. I spent the fall season engaged more than usual with

employees, customers and outside advisors focused ON our business, our industry and our family. By disengaging from much of the day-to-day decisions IN our business, I've had the time to observe and explore what new opportunities are out there and have gained a renewed appreciation for the importance of listening and reflecting.

I'll share some of my experiences this year and hopefully provide you with some ideas for how you can work ON your business.

Take a step back

In September, our Sales, Marketing and Brand teams gathered here in Minnesota for a week, gaining a wealth of knowledge and education, as well as developing new relationships and connections to do their jobs. Standing in a bareroot field, seeing a stand of branched elms with such uniformity and beauty ready for harvest after six years is spectacular. I sometimes don't realize the complexity and breadth of all that we do, and that week allowed me to step back and be open to learning like the rest.

If you're a manager or decision-maker in your company, take the time to recognize the people, the planning, the process and the attention to detail that produces the quality and consistency of your products.

Celebrate your wins, learnings and team

Another week, I was off to Quebec to visit customers and attend Pepiniere Abbotsford's 60th Anniversary celebration. Too often we don't take the time to celebrate our accomplishments. A third-generation business (only 3% make it that many generations in a family business), the Paquette's history and tradition was highlighted with a focus toward the future and the importance of their employees, customers, industry partners and friends. They even had helicopter rides over the farms and beer cans with the three generations of leaders. These are experiences that make a difference and the memories live on for years to come.

As we get closer to Bailey's 120th anniversary, I realize the planning will involve many employees, but it's important that we not only focus on those large celebrations. Being inclusive as you celebrate even the past year is important. This December, we're hosting a large employee volunteer project with Feed My Starving Children that ties in with our year-end celebration. It'll be an opportunity to gather together, focus on great team building, all while saying thank you to those who contribute to the success of the year.

Challenge yourself

Throughout the fall season, I had several chances to visit with people outside our industry. No matter the size of your business, connecting with others that bring varied experiences and perspectives is valuable. We're bringing on a new Advisory Board member—a newly retired finance executive from 3M (my employer for eight years before returning to Bailey). Her experience in finance structure, risk analysis and general business, paired with her interest in what we do and willingness to share her knowledge and advice, will be very helpful.

Additionally, we participate in a family business program where the subject at the fall meeting was "Fair vs. Equal"—a very thought-provoking topic, especially with family. And our state association engaged a consultant to evaluate our trade show model for the future, which resulted in an exciting new approach. These outside perspectives challenge our thinking by offering alternative approaches to similar issues and keep us looking forward to the long-term success, not just in the moment.

As your business enters the time of year to reflect on the past season and plan for the coming year and beyond, how you approach it is critical. No one can predict what 2023 will bring, but using your strategic plan, reflecting on your advantages and focusing on what you do best will set you on a positive course.

I also encourage you to dive into a task that you originally looked at with apprehension, as you'll find that to be a catalyst for learning, growing and change.

Take this column, for example. Even though I started with apprehension, it has been uplifting to look back on recent experiences and the positive impacts that occurred, as well as the plans that will be in motion for the future. I have such appreciation for the wealth of knowledge shared across disciplines in our industry and I look forward to the opportunity to embark on that journey together. **GT**

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