

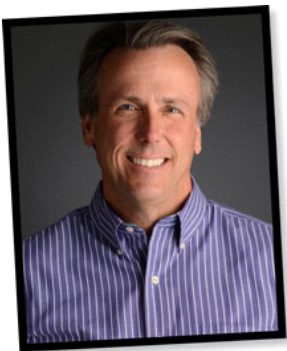
GROWERTALKS

Acres & Acres

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Traffic Jam

Chris Beytes



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For close to the last 20 years, my January travel plans have been the same: first to TPIE in Ft. Lauderdale and then on to IPM Essen in Germany, with only a brief stop at home in between for fresh socks. (My apologies to the folks who always ask, “See you at MANTS ...?” One of my colleagues or freelance editors attends that fine show. Somehow I got into this habit and habits are hard to break, don’t you know.)

The last time I was penning (we still say that even though we’re typing it into a computer—us writers are quaint that way) this column, I wrote about worry, a topic inspired by the keynote speaker at TPIE, inspirational illusionist Harris III.

This month, I’m inspired yet again by a keynoter, Ynzo van Zanten, who presented at the International Grower of the Year Awards. Ynzo used to be “chief evangelist” and “head of people and culture” for Dutch candy manufacturer Tony’s Chocolonely, a company started in 2005 that now has 18% of the Dutch market share, a meteoric rise due in large part to the company’s goal to end worker exploitation in the chocolate bean trade. Tony felt like he was the only one in the chocolate business interested in that goal, hence the “lonely” part of his company’s name.

Ynzo is a dynamic and inspiring speaker, the kind you enjoy listening to and who gives you food for thought. Such as the story he told about being stuck in traffic in Antwerp, Belgium, apparently a city known for its traffic jams.

When Ynzo called a friend to complain about the delay, the friend pointed out, sagely, “Ynzo, you are not stuck in traffic, you ARE the traffic.” Which forced Ynzo, the motivational speaker, to stop and contemplate. His friend was on to something. How often do we complain about something as if we were a victim, when actually we’re part of the problem?

“Boy, you just can’t find and keep good people,” we moan, blaming that new Amazon warehouse, the work-from-home trend, the \$15 minimum wage, the laziest generation and so forth, not stopping to consider that perhaps WE are the reason we can’t find and keep good people. Us, and the corporate culture we’ve built and fostered based on our wants and needs, not our employees. Or perhaps the wants and needs of a generation that’s reaching retirement or middle age.

Ynzo cited the statistic that only 13% of workers worldwide truly care about and are actively engaged in their positions at work. That’s an older stat; the most current that I could find, from Gallup, states that 23% of workers are fully engaged, so there’s been some improvement since then. (But they’re also more stressed than in the past, they add.) That still leaves 77% of workers disengaged with their jobs to one extent or another. And 51% are actively

looking for a new job or watching for openings. Why?

Harvard Business Review said there are three reasons that have held steady for years: “People leave their jobs because they don’t like their boss, don’t see opportunities for promotion or growth, or are offered a better gig (and often higher pay).” Two out of three are OUR responsibility.

Or customers. Lost any lately? Having trouble attracting new ones? Current ones a pain in the rear? That must be somebody else’s fault—cut-throat competitors or cheap buyers who don’t know quality or ...

Ynzo talked about customers, too, saying he now thinks in terms of “customer culture,” not customer service. One of his former business projects was UK’s Innocent Drinks. Go to their website, innocentdrinks.co.uk, for good examples of creating a customer-centric culture.

For instance, on a recent visit, the first thing that popped up was “today’s horoscope,” which read, “You will become unexpectedly interested in crushed fruit and companies that give 10% of profits to charity.” Intriguing. It certainly makes you want to click deeper, where you’ll learn they’re “a company that makes little drinks and cracks some bad jokes, but we’ve got some big dreams bouncing around in our heads.” I don’t know about you, but I would do business with a company that expresses so much personality.

Are you stuck in traffic? Or are you the traffic? Think about that next time you feel compelled to complain. **GT**