

Strive to Become a Better Manager

By Mark Halcomb, UT Extension Area Nursery Specialist

We must learn to think outside of the burlap. A nursery owner's success today is dependent more on the ability to manage than ever before. Deciding what to grow is very important. Our biggest competition is out of state, not here, in my opinion. Our large number of growers and the 30,000+ acres is a major draw. Visiting buyers are guaranteed of leaving here with what they came for, and we must see that they do. No other state can offer what we do, but some states are gaining on us in some areas. We must continually strive to maintain high standards of QUALITY and integrity. Plant prices should be based on production costs, not someone else's prices.

Nursery managers must increase their level of management, become more innovative and more professional. If you feel that you are already stretched to the limit, working from can to can't; then perhaps your management ability can be expanded. Growing plants is easy compared to marketing, labor management, collecting debts, etc. Don't you wish you could just stay on the tractor, grow QUALITY plants and forget the office? I wish you could too.

Avoiding the office and staying in the field can be part of the problem for some. Some of us are better at growing than managing, but you can't hide from the responsibilities and expect to succeed. Even with a phone, a nursery cannot be managed effectively from the field.

Management is hard. Where do we learn to manage? Some seem to do it better than others. When I compare the successes of similar nurseries, the difference is frequently due to management, in my opinion. Some nurseries hire middle managers, but good ones are hard to find. They're worth looking for. Consider hiring a production manager that will allow you to manage the business.

I know many nursery owners are not managing to their capabilities. It's human nature to work only to the point of producing the results that will satisfy our selves, families, customers or employers. I don't mean we need to sweat more, but work smarter, plan the tasks in more detail, improve management skills.

If you are always behind and if another tractor is needed, buy it. If you can't afford another tractor, then hire another driver. A tractor does not get tired in 8 hours like a man. Check the oil and change the oil and air filter regularly. A tractor can run 12-16 hours a day with 2 drivers. Let one driver work 6am to 2pm; and another drive it 2-8 pm,

or so. Rig lights if necessary on the tractor to shine on the implement. It can be done. Equipment can be rigged in the off-season.

The only excuse for a weedy field is poor management. The equipment and herbicides are available to the manager with determination. We can do a better job of getting preemergence herbicides banded in the fall and spring and the annual spring fertilization down on time to reduce hoeing and gain growth.

Maybe we can improve our managerial skills; broaden our abilities. Several books have been written by experienced, successful managers. Some will help organize, motivate or stimulate. Dwight Hughes of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, passes out a list of 30+ books that contain 'street smart' information often not found in traditional business literature. The library may have some of these, or any book store will order. Here's a portion of his list:

All You Can Do by Michael Gerber (Harper Business)
A Strategy for Winning by Carl Mays, 1-800-422-6946, (Lincoln Bradley Pub. Group)
Growing a Business by Paul Hawken (Simon and Schuster)
IACOCCA: an Autobiography by Lee Iacocca (Bantam)
In Search of Excellence by Thomas Peters & Robert Waterman (Harper & Row)
Leadership Is an Art by Max DePree (Doubleday)
Playing to Win by Fran Tarkenton (Harper & Row)
Rogers Rules for Success by Henry Rogers (St. Martins Marek)
Sam Walton Made in America by Sam Walton (Doubleday)
The One Minute Manager by Kenneth Blanchard & Spencer Johnson (Berkley Books)
The Wall Street Journal on Management by David Asman & Adam Meyerson (Don Jones Irwin)
Tough Times Never Last; but Tough People Do by Robert Schueller (Thomas Nelson Pub)
What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School by Mark McCormack (Bantam Books)

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