

New Year's Resolutions

By the time you read this column, most people who made New Year's resolutions will have broken many of them already. We start off with the best intentions every New Year, making resolutions to change our lives in some way, shape or form. But by the end of January, 90 percent of us will have given up on those changes. What New Year's resolutions did you make, and which ones did you already abandon?

BUSINESS RESOLUTIONS

For growers, I would suggest making New Year's resolutions to improve profitability for 2005. Don't just keep doing things the way you have been doing them if they aren't working. What kind of changes can you make? Here are some suggestions:

1. Introduce new products or added-value products to your customers. I encourage my clients to change 10 percent of their product mix every year, dropping things that don't sell well and introducing new items. This could be as simple as changing containers, growing new crops or varieties, or making different mixed containers. Retail customers want something new every year.

2. Reduce production costs, or improve production efficiencies. The biggest areas to concentrate on are reducing shrink, using automation wisely and finding better ways to do things. Shrink can be defined by plants you throw away or plants you loose during production. If you grow your own plugs, what is your yield per tray? Increasing your yield by 10 percent will more than pay for buying higher quality seed and paying your plug grower more. Automatic

transplanters work better the higher yield you get in your plug trays. Improving your growing practices can also reduce shrink. Better watering methods, feeding for controlled growth, ventilating more often for disease control, and using chemical growth regulators wisely can produce consistent quality plants that sell quickly. However, if you don't have a good sales team, your shrink can still be high, and weather has a lot to do with shrink.

What can you do with automation to reduce your labor costs? Look over your operation closely to determine where you need improvement that automation can provide. While you are looking, can you find ways to do things better, even if you don't automate?

3. Improve your customer service. No matter how good you think your customer service is, it can always be improved. People and training are obviously the biggest areas on which to focus. How do you want your people to treat your customers? How can you improve your communication with your customers, whether wholesale or retail? Finding better ways to meet your customers' needs will increase your sales!

4. Work smarter, not harder! This is a great motto to live by. In the greenhouse business, it is very easy to work longer hours for the same reward. But the key is to find ways to work smarter to get to the same endpoint. In that way, you can avoid working yourself and your people to death. Laying out on paper where you want to grow different crops will help avoid moving flats and pots all over the place. Automating order entry and improving order fulfillment can reduce mistakes and long nights. Scouting, ventilating and using the right chemicals can make pest and disease control a lot easier. Many growers are using growth regulators earlier in the crop cycle by drenching plugs or liners before transplant or within two weeks after transplant to reduce the number of sprays they have to do. Using your head will save your back.

PERSONAL RESOLUTIONS

I always figure New Year's resolutions should be made for your personal side as well as your work side. I know everybody wants to lose weight, find love, spend more time with family, etc. But what do you really want to change personally?

1. Spend more quality time with your family, and watching television together does not qual-



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ify. Helping your kids with their homework, teaching them new skills and providing a shoulder to cry on are just some small ways to increase quality time with your kids. And let's not forget about your spouse or significant other. Family vacations are always great quality time, if they are planned properly, but many people have reduced their vacation time due to job duties. Studies show that Americans take less vacation time than any other industrialized country. Finally, concentrate on the values you are instilling in your children. Your kids pick up a lot of pointers from you about how to treat people, knowing right from wrong, making good decisions, following through on commitments, expressing love and learning how to communicate. Are you setting a good example?

2. Improve your health and reduce your stress. I know, easier said than done. But the old saying still holds true — when you have your health, you have everything! Unfortunately, we tend to focus on our health too late. Ask yourself, do you want to quit smoking? Or lose weight? Or become more physically fit? What about your health do you want to improve? Starting now can add years later. Working smarter can also reduce stress, which can add more joy to your life.

3. Give back to the world. This can encompass a wide range of activities. Donating to your church, volunteering in your community or sending monetary contributions to world-wide groups are some ways of giving back. What ways make you feel the best? Don't do it because you think you should; do it because you want to make a difference!

Now, about those New Year's resolutions. Are you ready to reconsider your own? If you didn't make any, how about starting now! It is never too late to make changes for the better. Good luck with whatever changes you pursue in 2005! **GPN**

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