

FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

Last month at the Next Level Conference in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, I participated in a session on AmericanHort's SHIFT initiative.

Introduced last summer at Cultivate'15, SHIFT is "taking a hard look at what the future of our industry holds. [It encourages the industry] to shift the way business is done, consider new ways of interacting with customers, and to rethink how to approach future challenges."

AmericanHort recently released "An Introduction to SHIFT," a downloadable PDF with approximately 30 different insights and recommendations from its SHIFT initiative. These insights and recommendations present all businesses in the horticulture industry with insightful and tangible takeaways to prepare businesses for future and current consumers.

Three of the insights we discussed in Ft. Lauderdale and that AmericanHort plans to focus on are: Customer Profiles (Insight "Customers have distinct buying motivations"), Language (Insight "Garden retail language isn't consumer facing") and Reasons to Buy (Insight "Opportunities for Impulse Buys Should Be Strategically Incorporated into a Retail Layout").

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

When we started discussing language, it reminded me of a line in the 1967 movie "Cool Hand Luke" when the prison warden tells Paul Newman's character, "What we've got here is failure to communicate."

Most consumers don't speak the same language that a horticulture professional does and that can be very intimidating. And if they are intimidated, they may shy away from going to the garden center and purchasing the products you produce.

And when many consumers hear the word "gardening," to them that implies labor or working. Something many people try to avoid.

They also can be easily confused. They don't know what zone they are in, what the difference between an annual and a perennial is ... and if you use a plant's Latin name, then you've really lost them.

Many of them just want to enjoy the benefits of what our industry has to offer.

To achieve that goal, SHIFT recommends phrasing things so they "showcase the value" or the benefits of the product. For example, instead of "going out to plant a flower bed," try saying something like "creating a new beginning for everyone to enjoy."

To the horticulture professional, these phrases may just be euphemisms but it is the language of the modern day consumer.

Are you speaking the right language?

To learn more about the SHIFT initiative or to download the PDF, go to www.americanhort.org/shift. gpn



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