

Need Answers? Save Time by Asking the Right Question

With all the ways we can communicate today, you'd think we would get all the answers we want or need. Unfortunately, a lot of it seems like a one-way conversation. We get an email or text asking for us to do something, no problem right? You answer them and everything is great, right? Not always — there are a lot of people who, for some reason, don't know how to reply. Your supervisor sends you a text, and you are now at a crossroad; do you just read it and delete it, or do you hit the reply button and say something complicated or "got it" or "thanks?" Someone on the other end may be waiting for an answer.



Chase Agricultural Consulting, LLC was formed in 2011 by Ann (A.R.) Chase and Mike Zemke. Ann has more than 35 years experience in research, diagnostics and practical consulting in plant pathology. She has been retired from the University of Florida since 1994 but remains on staff as a Professor Emeritus. Mike holds an Associate of Applied Science in manufacturing drafting and started his education in horticulture when he and Ann were married in 1995. He specializes in communications of all sorts within the industry.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE

All people are different, and some only need a short answer while others need more detail. We find that some of our clients prefer texting, while others want an email or even a phone call. Back when we only had phone conversations, it was that ... a conversation, talking back and forth, communicating. We got our questions and answers. And, we knew if they understood us or even if they were listening at all.

These days it is unusual to get a response to a text or email. That means the "answer" may not have been received at all or maybe that you answered the wrong question. Figure out how the other person likes to get information and use that method. Or at least, tell them how you like to communicate.

WHEN TO COMMUNICATE

The other thing is how soon do you need an answer and how are you expecting it? We seem to expect instant answers now and if we don't have one we simply don't respond. Common courtesy is to reply back even if they don't require one. Answers can be easy: "Ok, got it," or "Thanks," or some other short word and even an emoji. Something that tells the sender you got their email or text. Most smartphones

now have a microphone built in that you can dictate your text; this might come in handy for those who can't spell!

If you don't have an answer, say so or "I'll have to get back with you" — some sort of acknowledgement. While writing this I just heard on the news that the firefighters in California fighting the big fires are having trouble communicating on their cellphones. Someone higher up in the fire department called their service provider and asked what could be done, and their answer was not an expected one. They were told to upgrade to a better plan, and now the service provider is taking some heat.

WHAT TO COMMUNICATE

How about as a grower you let a distributor know you are having issues with a particular disease, and you only get an answer like "There's several products you can use," but they don't tell you which ones? Of course, they wouldn't do that but that would not be the answer you were looking for if they did. You also probably need to know the rate to use, the interval to use and really what else would help solve the problem.

Ask the right person.

Ask the right questions.

Include information that will improve the answers.

The first issue is that you actually ask the right question(s). Otherwise, the quick text turns into a day-long interchange as you go back and forth with multiple Q&A. Get your thoughts in order before you start the chain. Think ahead and have some answers of your own. Ann always wants to know what has been done to control a disease before answering a question on how to fix something. Know the products, rates and intervals you have been trying. Know when the problem started, and consider taking a photo. The old saying "A picture is worth a thousand words" is still true. If you are busy and like speed, take a good picture before you are asked for one. Almost all of us have cellphones with great cameras. Use them!

It is also beneficial to know who to ask. If you take the quick and easy way out, your simple question can once again turn into a day- or week-long chain that is passed from one expert to another. It is useless to ask a horticulturist for disease control recommendations or a plant pathologist to recommend an effective PGR rate. Ask the right question of the right person and say thanks when they respond.

Make communicating work better and fast, and get your answers in time to help.

Ask the right person.

Ask the right questions.

Include information that will improve the answers.

And ... Say thank you! [gpn](#)