

# Generation What?

**Agriculture/farming has always shifted** from generation to generation. The changing face of this industry has accelerated dramatically over the past 100 years. Even in our part of this industry we've seen it and experienced it. In the past 20 years we are seeing more failure of greenhouse/nursery businesses that had planned on passing the reins to the next generation — but the next generation is not interested. As an owner, you are at a crossroad.

I imagine there's nothing more rewarding than seeing your kids and grandkids take over the business just like you did and keep it going. If this doesn't happen, you need to think outside the box. Do you sell to someone outside the family? Do you close up shop and move on to retirement? Even sole proprietors have a box based on their generation.

Successful businesses do not allow themselves to be defined by their own special generation. Moving forward to a new generation requires you to have a vision outside your own experience.

## TAPPING INTO TECHNOLOGY AND THE NEXT GENERATION

I hear the same thing every few months: Millennials don't want to get their hands dirty, put in the hours or limit their outside activities for the job. We hear that certain generations work all the time while others work minimally and focus on playing more. I don't think that's true in most cases — not all millennials are cut out to be computer geeks and/or work from home.

We've witnessed a flood of new software and equipment to help make our jobs easier. But if you are a baby boomer this may be challenging. Some of the millennials would fit right in and have no problem taking the reins. No doubt they will make their mark with their own designs and updates to existing structures and new ones as they step up or "In" to the plate of our greenhouse/nursery businesses.

The 40 Under 40 group is a good place to find such enthusiastic, next generation people that will be filling, in some cases, big shoes while in others will find themselves taking over a family business. If you are looking for employees in the Generation Z group you must offer them what they are looking for in a job — not what you might be looking for. Compromise is the name of the game; give some to get some.

## DON'T BOX YOURSELF OR OTHERS

Boxes are safe places that allow you to pretend that you are right; young or old we embrace the idea that no generation is

better than we are. Thus, we don't have to change anything. The world should adapt to us. Henry Ford's vision created the world's largest automotive business in the early 1900s. However, as time went on his vision stifled the growth of the new company. It was up to the next two generations to embrace a more forward-thinking approach and keep pace in the auto industry.

Moving forward to a new generation requires you to have a vision outside your own experience.

It is somewhat aggravating to be summarily put into any box whether you are 17 or 70. The problem with deciding all baby boomers are not interested in new technology is that you will be wrong. Not all millennials are technically adept either. In any event, putting people in boxes will limit what you do, what you learn and how your business runs. It's all a matter of facing reality. While the generation descriptions are useful, they are not hard and fast rules.

If you are truly engaged in having a successful business, then getting out of the box (at least occasionally) is a great way to improve your business and its chances for long-term success. The only way to stay vital is to change with the times.

As we bring Crossroads to an end, we have enjoyed getting out of our boxes to do this column with GPN for the past three years. It has made us look at our business with a broader approach and also think about our customers — you. Ann really had to get out of her box and is now looking forward to climbing right back in to the old scientist box. No doubt all of us in our personal or business lives will continue to have crossroads to deal with.

Keep a lookout for other upcoming articles from us! [gpn](#)



*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.*