



The past 12 months have been an unpredictable rollercoaster. While many of us felt discouraged or defeated at times, now is an opportune time to reconnect with the uniqueness of our industry and rediscover a bigger purpose.

I believe that it is in the darkest and hardest of times that we truly reveal who we really are. It is only then, when our limits are tested, that we unveil our true self. The past 12 months have been a surreal journey of anxiety, pain and loss; yet somehow, this same experience has also created the opportunity for a re-leveling of priorities, a reconnection to what matters most, to what may have been lost.

Our humanity is built on the communal sense of belonging, the innate belief that we are stronger together. While we all will be tested and sometimes stray, our instinctive fortitude binds us to our shared trait: to love and to nurture.

I still remember my father's advice when choosing my career; while struggling between the decision of diverging opportunities, he said, "You need to be proud of your profession; and flowers ... they just make people happy."

I feel blessed, the same as most others in horticulture, that my passion is also my vocation.

A BIGGER PURPOSE

It is always enjoyable to watch newcomers or outsiders to our profession, marvel in their astonishment, with our dedication; our drive to create and to share beauty. However, when stuck in the mire of our daily tasks, it is easy for us to lose sight of the uniqueness of our industry.

There may be moments when we get discouraged, instances we question our ambition, and unfortunately times that we mourn a loss of a co-worker, a counsel, a friend. But, we need to realize our role in something greater. We dream, design, grow and share plants with others; our purpose is bigger than ourselves. We are the stewards of the art of cultivation, agents of a connection to nature.

ADAPT AND INNOVATE

This past spring and summer — when stripped of the unnecessary of the customary — people wanted to garden, they wanted to nurture, they wanted beauty in their lives. It was amazing to see how well our industry stepped up to quickly pivot to the new norms of business and adjust to promote a safe work and retail environment. Our success was possible by our ability to adapt and to innovate.

The feverish demand for our products, while unprecedented and unexpected, should not be surprising. Gardening and decorating a home with plants and flowers are a proven pastime — a cross-generational activity that can be done either as a family or as a social distanced individual. Demonstrated by our growth of new customers in 2020, the concern should no longer be, "Where will we find our next generation of gardeners?" The question is now, "How do we inspire the next generation of gardeners we just met?" The answer is easy; just be us.

I am fortunate to be able to travel and visit many growers and retailers, and as different and unique that each operation is, the unifying trait is the passion for innovation. This creativity is displayed in many different forms, but always with the goals of creating progress and delivering solutions. Do not confine your vision for improvement, large or small, as long as you are evolving to meet your customer's needs, your investments will pay dividends.

A CONTINUED CONNECTION

We have benefited from our micro-bubble, which has kept our traditional consumer employed, but has limited their choices on how to spend their free time and extra income. However, we must be pragmatic and understand that this paradigm will not last much longer. We must challenge ourselves to strengthen the relationship with our new garden consumers, to help them succeed and feel the rewards and benefits that flowers and plants can bring to their lives. Just as we adapted this past year, we must be nimble in the face of change, and continue to be open to adopting new technologies and tools that can help drive the connections between our different businesses and consumers.

We are entering a period in our industry of new opportunities and growth, rapid developments in automatization, and focuses on efficiency and sustainability, and our success depends upon the rational understanding that we cannot do this alone. We need to work together to create the future we want, and shape the next generation of gardeners. [gpn](#)

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