

MAKING YOUR WAY THROUGH THE FOG

The 18-month journey through the pandemic has forced businesses to look at things differently than they have in the past.

BY MARK RICHARDSON

We are always looking for ways to make sense of things. When the pandemic hit 18 months ago, I tried to get people to think of the COVID-19 situation like a bridge to cross — and if you could get your head around COVID lasting three months, then it was a matter of just preparing for that three-month distance.

Then about a year ago I began thinking of the overall dynamics like a perfect storm that you needed to prepare for (the pandemic, the election and the economy). Also, around that time the imagery that came to my mind was that the impending situation was much like driving in a dense fog. You did not know what was ahead. It could have been sunny skies or a cliff.

We all needed to slow down and look shorter term. I encouraged people to think about a 12-week year (not a 12-month year). We could look in the rear-view mirror and it all made sense, but looking forward was not at all clear.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

A friend of mine reminded me of this metaphor that I used last year and said that, while the fog is not all around us like it was a year ago, it is still pretty foggy ahead of us.

Now we can see to our left and we can see to our right. We can even feel confident about the next couple of months. But looking beyond two or three months is fog. We are driving

toward it, but we just don't know exactly what lies ahead of us. The not knowing provides us with more questions than answers, which can be disconcerting.

Is COVID going to hit us hard again? Will we be forced to move back into lockdown? Will the government bail us out again? Will all this create the same demand for horticulture products? Are team members going to have so many scares that it is tough to get through it again? How will the economy respond? Will the supply chain challenges get worse?

I am not saying this to provide fear of this uncertainty. I am saying this to encourage you to think. I am asking these questions not for answers that we don't know but for you to make your decisions today with these uncertainties in mind.

SOME TIPS AND ADVICE

To help you navigate through the fog, here are a few tips and some advice:

1. Slow down and ask these questions before making any long-term decisions and commitments.
2. Listen. Keep your ear to the ground and listen to the voices both internally and externally. They can provide insights.
3. Go strong on the no-brainer decisions and kick the can down the road a little on the

bigger, more uncertain ones.

4. Join a peer group so you are not alone.
5. Sell more products/programs where you can control the supply and know you have the ability to execute.
6. Make sure your marketing message and strategies are solid and in place.
7. Invest more time in thinking about the business, not just doing business.

We all would like a sunny day with clear and beautiful views ahead, but that is not the case as I write this in late July. The good news is the fog is no longer totally surrounding us. The good news is we can see where we are stepping right in front of us. The good news is we now have been through this unprecedented time before.

I think it is safe to say we feel grateful we are in the horticulture industry and consumers will continue to purchase your products and enhance their lives. ■

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