

floral management

THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY

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APRIL-MAY 2017 | VOLUME 34 | NUMBER 2



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Viewpoint BY MACKENZIE NICHOLS

CONFESSIONS OF A FLOWER SHOP EMPLOYEE

> A customer enters the flower shop, breathes in and exclaims, "It smells wonderful. You must love working here." I smile in agreement, adding that I am now accustomed to the smell. I am thoughtful about this exchange, especially as my day is particularly chaotic.

For me, the draw of working in a flower shop is the natural beauty of the product — the crisp smell of a hyacinth is purifying, and the luxurious pattern of a dahlia evokes nostalgia for my grandmother's garden.

I am a part-time florist at Tiger Lily in Charleston, South Carolina. I moved to the south 10 months ago from Boston, Massachusetts, where I studied journalism at Northeastern University and worked for Fern by Boston Rose Florist. I moved to Charleston because I was tired of the snow and wanted to explore a different part of the country.

Upon moving to my new home, I saw the Tiger Lily delivery vans around town and contacted the general manager to ask if she was hiring. She asked me to come in, and I auditioned with a dozen red roses and a free-range mix arrangement. The audition was intimidating, but to my excitement, I was hired on the spot.

Since joining Tiger Lily and learning more about the floral industry, I've realized that those at the shop were probably excited to find me, too. It's hard to find young, experienced employees who aren't afraid of long, physical work. Owners, frustrated by the challenge of building strong teams, may sometimes wonder: What makes a good employee stay? What makes her leave?

For me, the benefits are many. There is never a moment of rest at Tiger Lily. Even on a slow day, there's something that needs to be done. Whether I am answering the phones, daily arranging or producing for weddings, I am always on the go.

I kneel down to pick off a plant's browning leaves, and I am interrupted when a customer calls to place an order. A driver returns from a trip and is ready to go on another excursion across town, and I still have four more arrangements to complete. In the midst of producing 10 identical centerpieces for a wed-

ding, I realize that I am running out of greenery and must improvise. I come home tired — yet fulfilled — every day.

And then there's the ongoing positive reinforcement. When I am working as a daily designer, I feel pride when I receive positive feedback from either a customer or a colleague. I feel accomplished on wedding setups when I see my pieces naturally complement a table setting.

There are certain drawbacks to working for a flower shop that I think could be off-putting, particularly to younger workers. Managers must cut back hours during the slow seasons in late summer and early winter. Some may be disheartened by the mundane work such as washing buckets and vases, or cleaning the shop. For those who are looking for a year-round job making money quickly in a laid-back environment, they may be hit with the reality that working for a flower shop is quite laborious.

But here's my advice to owners who want to draw in young, capable workers who have the potential to work in your shop for years: Offer encouraging words during those particularly taxing days. Get to know your employees' interests, and promote creativity. Bring humor and energy to the workplace. Provide opportunities for internships and urge senior members to mentor the younger staff.

Above all, I want floral arranging always to be a part of my life. I adore making art with the nature that surrounds us. When customers say to me, "You must love working here," I look to the flowers perhaps instead of the hundred vases that need cleaning and think to myself, "Yes, I do." 🌸



Mackenzie Nichols is a freelance journalist and a floral designer at Tiger Lily Florist in Charleston. She earned her bachelor's degree in journalism from Northeastern University and has two years of experience in the floral industry.

color beyond ordinary



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What Inspires Us

> The most famous customer service story of all time is about a guy in the 1980s who walks into a Nordstrom department store in Fairbanks, Alaska, puts two snow tires on the counter and asks for his money back. Despite the fact that Nordstrom doesn't sell snow tires, the sales clerk looks at the price tag on the tires, reaches into the till, pulls out the equivalent in cash and sends him on his way.

Now, whether this actually happened is still up for debate (Nordstrom has both validated and denied it over the years), but the tale nonetheless elevated the notion of an unconditional guarantee as standard business practice.

Fast forward 30 years. If only offering a money-back guarantee were all it took to gain repeat buyers, right? Customer service experts say the most successful retailers today, the ones getting repeat business, are providing a seamless shopping experience that leaves the buyer thinking, "Well, that was easy."

Eliciting that kind of a snap judgment is, well, anything but a snap. It takes more than a no-questions-asked guarantee. And more than a friendly, affable

sales clerk on the other end of the phone or counter. Experts agree it's countless carefully orchestrated processes behind the scenes that evolve painstakingly over time and eventually become part of your business's standard operating procedures and, as a result, your brand.

Senior contributing editor Mary Westbrook went on a hunt for floral retailers who have deliberately evaluated and refined the way they serve customers and have profited as a result. In "Beyond Impressed," (p. 23), you'll see what these processes look like and how they come together to create a goof-proof and rave-worthy customer experience. In addition, this month's Snapshot (p. 12), Talent (p. 16) and Quality (p. 48) departments show how your displays, your employees, and the product in your coolers can be part of your customer service brand.

Also in this issue:

Mark Anderson debunks some of the conventional thinking surrounding discounting during high volume periods and shows how strategically-timed Mother's Day offers can draw in new (or long lost) customers and help with inventory management (p. 14).



Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, asks you to ignore topline sales for a few pages and instead take a look at whether your design room practices are helping or hurting your bottom line (p. 36).

Brad Denham's missive on getting out of a rut (p. 18) might be just the nudge you need to try some of the many new ideas shared this month.

Finally, speaking of exemplary service: In "Telling the Industry's Story," (p. 30), we give a special shout out to the 100-plus floral industry members who ignored the forecasts of snow and sleet and traveled to Washington, D.C., to represent our industry on Capitol Hill. 🌸

Kate Penn
kpenn@safnow.org

More Online ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON WWW.SAFNOW.ORG



VALENTINE'S DAY RESULTS

How did your shop's sales for Valentine's Day 2017 compare to the industry's overall? Check out SAF's full coverage of the holiday, including florist feedback as well as the results of both the SAF-commissioned consumer poll as well as the survey of SAF retailers. safnow.org/vdayresults



FRESH OFF THE HILL

Once you've reviewed the recap of SAF's Congressional Action Days (p. 31), be sure to check out the video interviews of several attendees, conducted after they met with lawmakers on the Hill. You'll see firsthand why it's an extraordinary and empowering experience. safnow.org/cadvideos



MR. PAAL GOES TO WASHINGTON

How do you make a case to a congressional committee to consider the floral industry's interests as they craft legislation? Just ask Skip Paal (p. 40), of Rutland Beard Floral Group, based in Catonsville, Maryland. Or, better yet, check out his testimony and watch him in action. safnow.org/moreonline



MOTHER'S DAY RESOURCE CENTER

SAF has all kinds of tools to help you drive sales and profits for Mother's Day, from full tutorials on pricing and streamlining your operations, to online graphics and much more. Check them out, at safnow.org/moreonline.



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SAF Member Forum



Experience Matters

> As a long-time educator, consultant and presenter, I would like to bring to SAF's attention an issue that is affecting our industry at-large. I know SAF is already aware of the "changes" in the industry, as we discuss these at every WF&FSA and SAF convention. Having discussed and shared my thoughts

below with other industry notables "off camera," I feel confident sharing this with SAF. What I am writing below is not popular, yet it's (my) reality.

SAF exists because of old-time educated industry leaders: growers, shippers, brokers, wholesalers and "traditional" brick and mortar retailers and their wire service commitment and dedication, like mine, to the industry and SAF. It's all we've got!

Floral Management's emphasis on newer and upcoming professionals in the wedding industry field is especially troublesome ("Raise the Roof," March 2017). I am writing this as a balance, not as an objection. "Upbeat" keeps everybody happy!

As you have covered numerous times, the U.S. floral industry is facing serious challenges. New-entry, uneducated professionals do not believe in gathering to learn. Call it the counter-culture! Trade associations have few members or are defunct. (As a long-time board member of the California State Floral Association I can share that we have 193 paid members!) New

industry entries learn mostly online. Specifically, YouTube, Pinterest and Facebook are the new "bible." There are a lot of preachers out there, many of whom have never been to one professional course, class or workshop or convention!

Education and skill are key. Many of the industry members, some of whom you covered in the wedding issue, are relatively new, enthusiastic and very exciting. Just what every bride wants. But, there is a but...

In speaking to large floral wholesalers who used to sell to flower shops, they have been actively marketing to the new "florist." Three large, well-established wholesale operations have told me they "can't keep up with the turnover with the newly acquired wedding designer companies." After all, the floral design business is "easy in, easy out!"

I would really like to see a balanced article about lifetime company owners/designers and how they see the industry in the long term and real-time strategies; i.e., ask [former SAF President] Charles Kremp, AAF, [of Kremp Florist in Philadelphia] and other SAF retail members.

I know many of the people you have covered personally, and they say, "Times are tough, and I have no idea about tomorrow." Simply "charging more" is not the answer in our increasingly commoditized industry; i.e., the now nationwide Trader Joe's low-margin supermarket is selling 10 stems of miniature calla lilies at \$8.99 yet charging \$5.00 for a calla lily boutonniere seems easy! The budget-minded bride has all this information from just about every wedding blog.

My points: Write a balanced real-time report on what we can do to thrive in our skill-driven industry. Ask those who have made SAF and Floral Management a mainstay. Yes, new blood is exciting, enthusiastic and exhilarating! As an instructor I support many new "wannabes." After six years of (Dutch) horticulture education and apprenticeship, I was one myself. 🌹

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➤ Picture this: a slate of more than three-dozen experts on hand offering advice to improve your marketing, cut your costs, increase your sales and more; a ballroom full of exceptional flowers in contention for Best in Show; and networking opportunities around every corner of an opulent oceanfront destination.

SAF Palm Beach 2017, the Society of American Florists' 133rd annual convention, returns to The Breakers in Palm Beach — one of Florida's most historic hotels — Sept. 6-9, and some members are already counting down the days.

Corri Levelle, owner of Sandy Rose Floral in North Hollywood, California, admitted to "stalking the SAF website in anticipation of registering." She at-

tended the convention last year, lured by the exotic Hawaiian location, and was blown away by all she learned. "What I found was a vital group of professionals committed to sharing, growing and encouraging each other," she said. "It was an experience I will never forget and will repeat whenever possible. Can't wait for another shot in the arm!"

Excited for her fifth convention, Rakini Chinery, AAF, AzMF, owner of Allan's Flowers & More in Prescott, Arizona, looks forward to reconnecting with friends and asking fellow attendees to reveal their best promotions and advertising strategies.

At SAF Marco Island 2014, a florist told her about "Wine and Design," a program that combines floral design classes, mingling and adult beverages. "We do it monthly now, with 20 or more people attending these fun evenings," she said.

She also appreciates the diversity of speakers who cover a slew of pertinent topics, including branding, social media, profitable design, customer service and effective managing. "Continuing to educate ourselves and our staff is the primary way we, as florists, can stay relevant in the ever-changing world of commerce and retail," she said.

First-time attendee Darlene Dolbow, owner of Ramone's Flowers in Wilmington, Delaware, signed up



EARLY BIRDS Nicole Palazzo of City Line Florist, Inc., in Trumbull, Connecticut, and Frank Zepeda of Murrieta V.I.P. Florist in Murrieta, California, grab front-row seats for an educational session at SAF Maui 2016. "This will be my second convention and my mom's fourth," Palazzo said of SAF Palm Beach 2017. "We wouldn't miss another for the world!"

in hopes of reinvigorating herself. "I think it will make me excited to come home and try something new," she said. Additionally, she can't wait to check out the Outstanding Varieties Competition. "I'm very interested in learning about new products and where to get them," she said.

Nicole Palazzo and her mother, Sue, owners of City Line Florist in Trumbull, Connecticut, are "over the moon" with excitement for SAF Palm Beach 2017. The Palazzos met their accountant (Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI), sales mentor (Tim Huckabee) and Hortica insurance agent at past conventions.

"The networking alone makes the trip worthwhile," Nicole Palazzo said, adding that SAF offers a higher caliber of educational sessions that she hasn't found anywhere else. She's eager to learn new ways to capture her market, find top-quality flowers at the best price and manage employees to make her work environment the best place it can be.

"This will be my second convention and my mom's fourth," she said. "We wouldn't miss another for the world!"

Get a sneak peek at the programming for SAF Palm Beach 2017 at safnow.org/annual-convention. 🌿



GOOD TIMES Excited for SAF Palm Beach 2017 — her fifth SAF convention — Rakini Chinery, AAF, AzMF, (center) owner of Allan's Flowers & More in Prescott, Arizona, took in a program at SAF Maui 2016 with Robert Bryant, AAF, AIFD, of Flowers By Robert Taylor in West Covina, California, and Tiffany Wesseler of Eagledeale Florist in Indianapolis.

SAF in Action

ST. LOUIS, BOSTON AND LOUISVILLE ADDED TO SAF 1-DAY PROFIT BLAST TOUR

➤ Professionals who want high-quality floral business education at an affordable price can count on SAF's 1-Day Profit Blast to deliver information on sales, technology, management and design. The Society of American Florists has lined up three more Profit Blast events this year: July 22 in St. Louis, Sept. 23 in Boston and Nov. 4 in Louisville, Kentucky.

Registration for each is \$139 early bird for members and \$99 for each additional attendee from the same company. To offer first-class education at a low registration fee, SAF partners with wholesalers to offset the event's cost. For example, the St. Louis Profit Blast is sponsored by Baisch & Skinner and DWF.

Steve Frye, Baisch & Skinner's vice president and general manager, said he believes attendees will leave the event with a wealth of vital information that will help to inspire them as they run their shops.

"The concept of the 1-Day Profit Blast is great. It's close to home, doesn't take a lot of time or resources and it allows attendees to experience the benefits of SAF membership in a meaningful way," Frye said. "Attendees learn about key elements of their business, visit one-on-one with prominent industry vendors and growers, share thoughts and ideas with their peers and perhaps most importantly, come away with the genuine sense that they're members of a national organization that has their best interests in mind."



BRING THE TEAM Brad and Lisa Golter (far right) brought five team members from their shop, Longmont Florist Inc. to SAF's 1-Day Profit Blast in Denver last fall. From left: Linda Perkins, Sue Price, Dawna Masteller, Lexi Ramstine and Barb Vigil.

Jacobson Floral Supply is sponsoring the Boston event on **Sept. 23**; and the Bill Doran Company is sponsoring the Louisville event on **Nov. 4**. For details, go to safnow.org/1-day-profit-blast. 🌿

GET READY FOR MOTHER'S DAY WITH SAF'S WEBBLASTS

➤ Webinars are a convenient way to get the education you need, when you want it — all with just the click of a mouse.

The Society of American Florists hosts its next 30-minute WebBlast, "**Mother's Day Mania**," on April 19 at 3 p.m. Eastern. TeamFloral leads the 20-minute presentation plus 10 minutes of questions and answers. Register now to participate in the live WebBlast at safnow.org/webinars. It's free for members; \$29.95 for non-members.

Members have exclusive access to SAF's WebBlast recordings, including "**Mother's Day Strategies for Buying & Marketing**" presented by Vonda LaFever, AIFD, PFCI, of TeamFloral and Bill LaFever, PFCI, of the Bill Doran Company. "**Mother's Day Pricing for Profits**" with FloristWare's Mark Anderson; and "**5 Questions to Ask Your Team the Week**

After Mother's Day" with Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI, of Crockett, Myers & Associates, Inc.

Other presentations available: "**5 Steps to Profitable Weddings and Events**" with Ryan O'Neil of Twisted Willow Design; "**The Generations of Flowers Study**" with Marc Goulet of Russell Research; and "**Is Your Workplace Drug-Free?**" with Hortica's Connie Turner, SPHR. 🌿

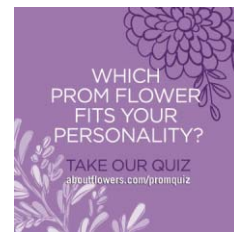


available free to SAF members at safnow.org/webinars.

ONLINE LEARNING

Vonda LaFever, AIFD, PFCI, vice president of TeamFloral, presented "Are You Leaving Money on the Design Bench?" and co-presented "Mother's Day Strategies for Buying & Marketing." Both 30-minute WebBlasts are

SAF'S PROM RESOURCE CENTER HELPS FLORISTS ATTRACT TEEN SHOPPERS



CHEAT SHEET At safnow.org/prom, members can copy and paste social media messages and grab graphics to capitalize on SAF's Prom Quiz.

➤ Flowers are a staple of the prom experience, and if florists can make teen customers happy during this time, they can count on having loyal customers for years to come. To get assistance promoting your prom business, members can turn to the Society of American Florists' Prom Resource Center at safnow.org/prom.

It provides members with 36 suggested messages and seven graphics to post on social media. The graphics show corsages that illustrate each prom flower personality featured in the interactive quiz on SAF's consumer site, AboutFlowers.com/promquiz. The suggested social media messages are tailored specifically for Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. Messages include:

- For Instagram: Prom season is here and you need the perfect flower to fit your style! Which flower are you? Take the Prom Quiz and see. Go to aboutflowers.com/promquiz! #prom #promdress #prom2017 #prom2k17 #seniorprom #juniorprom
- For Twitter: What celeb BFF would you want in your prom group? Tell us at <http://bit.ly/promquiz>!
- For Facebook (where you will find their moms, aunts, family friends): Know a teen planning for prom? Check out this fun quiz to see what flowers might fit their personality! aboutflowers.com/promquiz

"It's no secret teens love to share their opinions and participate in social media engagements," said SAF Vice President of Marketing Jennifer Sparks. "The Prom Quiz, suggested social media messages and graphics make it easy for busy florists to promote their prom business in a fun, creative way to teens and their parents." 🌿

snapshot

Monday Morning Flower & Balloon Co. PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY



THE LOOK, THE FEEL Several years ago, Monday Morning Flower and Balloon Co. removed a cooler from the center of its 1,000-square-foot retail space to allow more product on the floor. "I wanted more of a European market look," Vinicombe said. "Now, customers can see and touch the product."



KYO MORISHIMA PHOTOGRAPHY

BE OUR GUEST

➤ In-store, a goal at Monday Morning Flower and Balloon Co. in Princeton, New Jersey, is two-fold: Make life easy — for customers and for staff — and make everyone feel comfortable.

That philosophy extends to production. "We restyled our design area almost a year ago," said Georgianne Vinicombe. "We put everything more central to the designers. Each station is just a few steps away from our large walk-in and the sinks."

Still, that idea — easy, comfortable — is especially clear in the retail area, where open space, bright colors and signs and product galore engage all of customers' senses while ensuring staff members can get their jobs done efficiently and happily. 🌿



THE MORE THEY KNOW Vinicombe displays logoed signs reminding customers of store services, products and potential add-on items.

I'M WORTH IT The cheerful, conversational language on the store's signage taps into the shop's brand as a go-to place for designs for all occasions. Word choice matters to Vinicombe: She's been known to gently (but firmly) correct employees' grammar, and team members are coached on how to respond consistently and on-brand to emails.



SIGN, SEALED, DELIVERED

Clear prices and labels — created with a little personalized flair in handwriting — help make the shopping experience less intimidating for customers. The approach has some research to back it up: Marketing professors at Clark University and The University of Connecticut found that consumers "perceive sale prices to be a better value when the price is written in a small font rather than a large, bold typeface," according to CBS News.

The Right Price BY MARK ANDERSON

RESOLVING THE HOLIDAY DISCOUNT DILEMMA

➤ There is an old, ongoing debate about the wisdom of offering discounts to encourage advance ordering at major floral holidays.

Those in favor of the practice argue that advance orders let you buy sooner and with more confidence, in larger quantities and at lower prices than buying at the last-minute, when you must fill orders as they come in. The approach can mean real savings and peace of mind.

Those who discourage the practice usually have a fast retort: "It's Mother's Day. Customers are going to buy from you anyway. Why give anything away?"

That response is logical. (Cocky, but logical.) A lot of other retailers are going to try and beat you to that sale. Some of them will even be masquerading as you, at least online. But if you are certain you're going to get a sale anyway, and having it on the books well in advance won't change the way you buy (or the way you sleep at night), then there is no reason to discount.

A Third Option

The problem with this discussion is that it assumes a simple binary position: discount or don't discount. A better approach, made possible by technology and modern pricing practices, is to discount only to the extent it helps you, with a focus on the people that need a discount to buy. To get to that sweet spot, ask yourself two questions:

1. How much do you value having orders on the books?

If advance orders help you buy cheaper and sleep better, than you should plan on discounting more aggressively, both in terms of the size of the discount and the number of people to whom you offer it.

If you are confident sales are going to materialize, then you can be less aggressive in your discounting, but it should still be an important part of your holiday marketing plan.

2. Who gets the discounts?

This depends on your answer to the first question. If you really, really want to get orders on the books soon, then you probably want to discount to everyone.

If, however, you are certain that some customers are going to buy from you anyway, then don't discount to them. Instead, the value you offer these customers is convenience and better service. When you reach out to them, stress that you have handled their needs in the past and can do it again this time.

Even if you feel supremely confident in your ability to close lots of sales, that doesn't mean you shouldn't discount at all. This year, pay special attention to the people your data says are not likely to order for Mother's Day. Maybe they used to send mom flowers and stopped. Maybe they switched to a competitor. Maybe they buy roses at Valentine's Day but go to brunch on Mother's Day.

Whatever the case, if they didn't come to you for flowers last year, they aren't likely to this year. You want to change their buying behavior, and discounting is a great way to do it.

Best Practices for Discounts

For best results, a few principles can help make your discounts more effective.

Always use charm pricing when discounting. If a price doesn't end in a nine, people just don't believe they are saving. You don't have to use cents, but whatever you use, the last number has to be a nine.

Provide an offer long in advance of the holiday, but with a short cut-off time. It helps you get orders on the books sooner and also acts as a hurdle — a customer who isn't serious about saving money won't be interested in placing their order before they have even started thinking about Mother's Day. We'll sell to them at full price later (maybe with a discount for a Friday pick-up). The cut-off date should be tight to create a sense of urgency. If you send the offer on a Monday four weeks before the event, the cut-off date should be later that same week. You can then follow up with a "last chance to save" offer the following week, again with a cut-off a few days later.

Another strategy is to offer special (unique) products/bundles for advance ordering and/or customers you



don't expect to buy. Maybe a neighboring business will give you coupons for \$10 off their product or service, and adding these to the bundle makes a price comparison more difficult. This makes your early bird special look a lot more special without getting into percentages.

How do you decide how much to discount? By keeping the two key objectives discussed earlier in mind: to buy in advance at lower prices and to activate/reactivate customers you did not expect to buy otherwise. How much you discount depends on what you're willing to give up in margin and invest in gaining or regaining customers. 🌿

Mark Anderson is founder and president of FloristWare. When he's not developing and servicing POS software, he's pursuing his other passion, pricing strategy, as a contributor to Business.com as well as through programming at SAF and other industry events. mark@floristware.com

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Talent BY MARY WESTBROOK



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

ALANNA DRZYZGA

Lead Designer

Monday Morning Flower and Balloon Co.
Princeton, New Jersey

Can you share this position post?

If you aren't asking your best employees to share your current job openings on social media, you may be missing out on an excellent and inexpensive way to recruit top talent — year-round and for part-time or seasonal help. "A highly engaged employee is the most effective recruiting tool," explains Patrick Cummings of Human Resources Inc. in Crofton, Maryland. "Encourage your employees to use social media to spark the interest of talented contacts."

> When Alanna Drzyzga first walked through the front door of Monday Morning Flower and Balloon Co. about six years ago, she thought, "I like it here." That's because the shop, headed by Georgianne and Kevin Vinicombe, was clean and organized. "Everything was labeled," Drzyzga explained. After more than a decade in the industry, she knew that some shops make getting and staying organized a low, low priority. Her positive first impression — that the shop was warm, inviting and ready to serve — proved correct. Today, that's the very impression Drzyzga herself works hard to convey consistently to every customer.

How I Started.

"My first position here was customer care coordinator. We can get a little one-sided in the floral industry. You see the flow-

ers, design them and send them out the door. Working as a care coordinator, I saw things from a customer's perspective. Words we use all the time make no sense to a customer, but they slip into our conversations: Fill to value? What's that? I'm aware of that now, and how it can negatively affect a customer's experience."

How I Operate.

"We have procedures in place for everything. I love it. Everyone writes emails in the same format, signs them the same way. We have a process for sending out invoices. Other shops I've been in, there wasn't a place for everything. Here, we have a binder for every wedding, driving directions for every venue. It's a well-oiled machine. All that organization empowers people. It's never, 'Oh, I can't do that thing or answer that question

because Alanna isn't here.' We all know how things work, and so the customer never has to wait either."

Most Challenging Part.

"You have to match your customers' feelings — so you're dealing with a wedding, and then in the same day, a sympathy design. That can be taxing. Sometimes, a person may complain because her roses didn't last, but the real problem is her mom passed away, and her mom used to give her roses. She's grieving. You have to dig — and listen. Humanity has ebbs and flows of emotion."

Why I Stay.

"Every day is different. That's huge for me. Every day, I know I'll learn something new and create something new. I like that. It's constant learning." 🌿

3 Habits of Unhappy Managers

Want to be a great boss? Be honest with people — even when it's hard. That's a message behind the new book "Radical Candor: Be a Kickass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity," by Kim Scott, who has held management positions

at Google and Apple. In a recent interview with Forbes magazine, Scott detailed three less-than-candid behavior patterns bosses fall into that can sabotage any business:

"Ruinous Empathy"

Scenario: You watch an employee make a minor mistake and don't offer a correction.

Better path: Dole out corrections clearly and quickly, so that employees learn proper procedures and don't repeat offenses. "Rise above your empathy and realize that it's your own feelings you are protecting, not theirs," Scott said.

"Obnoxious Aggression"

Scenario: In the midst of

Mother's Day prep, you lash out at your manager in front of your staff over a missed deadline.

Better path: Take a breath and remember that everyone, even you, can make a mistake.

"Manipulative Insincerity"

Scenario: You're disappointed with your lead designer's plan for a

summer collection, but you gush to her that it's fantastic — and that she's fantastic — while secretly thinking up ways to redo her work. Better path: Worrying if people like you is not a path to profitability or loyalty. When you disagree with someone or don't like an outcome, speak up and speak candidly.

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
TRAINING

BIGGER
WEDDING
SALES

STAFF
MANAGEMENT

INCENTIVE
PLANS
FOR STAFF

TRAINING
NEW
EMPLOYEES

SALES
EDUCATION

POS
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Growth BY BRAD DENHAM

FIGHTING BACK AGAINST ‘GOOD ENOUGH’

➤ Inertia is something we all face. Looking back at the 14 years of my floral career, I now recognize periods of time in which we didn't make much movement, either forward or backward. It seems clear now that our biggest competitors were not order-gatherers and supermarkets but simply the status quo — getting too comfortable with things being “good enough.”

Interestingly, during these periods of stagnation we always felt busy; however, we eventually realized that doing nothing new was just as bad as doing the same thing over and over. It wasn't that we were too lazy to try new ideas or routines — we just let inertia take over.

To understand what held us back, and what could be holding you back, let's turn to Isaac Newton.

Bucking the ‘Law of Inertia’

Newton's First Law of Motion accurately describes that state of our business during periods of inertia: An object at rest will remain at rest unless acted on by an unbalanced force. An object in motion continues in motion with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted upon by an unbalanced force. This means that there is a natural tendency for people to keep on doing what they're doing.

In our case, although we were doing a large volume of business, we weren't growing the areas of our business that were most important to our long-term profitability.

In fact, almost every florist I speak to goes through periods of time where they feel they are simply going through the motions of running their flower shop as if it is on autopilot. If you are happy with the current state of your business, maybe this Groundhog Day-style process works for you; however, we found that the “wash, rinse and repeat” process of running our flower business was actually counterproductive to our long-term goal — growth — and the happiness of our team.

As a former franchise florist, our quest was to reduce dependency on wire orders. Without building our own brand, though, that shift was never going to happen. Once we started coming up with unique ideas to start building our own direct business we could feel momentum gaining.

The same is true when attempting to jump-start your latest, greatest entrepreneurial endeavor. The idea alone will not make you successful; one must actually start the process of bringing that idea to life.

You may view large floral businesses as having a competitive advantage, but it's actually easier to test a new idea and gain favorable results as a smaller florist.

Most successful founders will tell you that their first idea wasn't their most successful, and they usually don't end up where they began. For example, our original plan was to build a 20-store flower franchise, but our most successful flower ideas (opening a wedding florist and wholesale flower market) happened only after we were forced to shutter six retail store locations. Had we not applied an unbalanced force (closing stores) to disrupt the motion and path of failure we were headed down, it surely would have been a much different outcome. After all, failure and success are very similar. Both are like riding a train: once you start, the inertia keeps you going.

Newton's Second Law of Motion in Action

Everyone unconsciously knows Newton's Second Law: Heavier objects require more force to move the same distance as lighter objects.

This law applied in our case in 2010 when we made the decision to abandon our failed franchise dreams. By having a smaller mass (store count) we could more easily utilize the force (resources) we had to rapidly accelerate our plans to

profitably rebuild our business. Applying this law resulted in exponential sales growth in six short years, from \$4 million in annual revenue to more than \$9 million annually.

While you may be hesitant to try new things because your operation is small or you don't feel you have the scale to take on new ideas, consider the fact that it takes less effort to increase your sales when starting at a lower number. This means that while you may view large floral businesses as having a competitive advantage, it's actually easier to test a new idea and gain favorable results as a smaller florist. If the fear of failing big is holding you back, consider that as a small florist you can better limit your risk but still move the needle with smaller marketing investments as compared to a large order-gatherer.

For example, one of our most successful marketing ideas has been to promote free flower giveaways on Facebook at key floral holidays in order to incent people to walk in our store. While the ROI has been amazing, the more success we have had and the larger we have grown the more we have to risk in inventory and ad spend in order to continue obtaining the same sales lift.

Understanding and applying Newton's Laws of Motion to your business ideas could be just what you need to jump-start your success. What's stopping you from getting started? As Albert Einstein once said, “Failure is success in progress.” (More on that idea in another column!) 🌿



Brad Denham is a founding partner in Arizona Family Florist, the parent company of Arizona Florist, Arizona Flower Market and

LUX Wedding Florist and winner of Floral Management's 2012 Marketer of the Year Award. He oversees the strategic business development, including branding, web development and e-commerce strategy, of all of the brands. Arizona Republic and BizAZ Magazine have named Denham one of Arizona's top entrepreneurs. brad@azfamilyflorist.com



M

— MAGNUM —

MAGNUM

XXL FLOWER

HUNDREDS OF PETALS

STRONG STEM

LONG LASTING BEAUTY

The word 'magnum' means 'big', and this is exactly why we called this disbudded chrysanthemum Magnum. Its flower is huge: to call Magnum a size XXL is no exaggeration! Not only does its flower get even bigger in the vase as the weeks go by, but it also becomes more spherical. This large eye-catching white flower with bright green at its centre is simply packed with petals. In fact, Magnum has so many ray petals that the flower never opens completely to reveal any disc petals in its centre, even after weeks in the vase. Magnum is an ultra-strong variety that has passed every transport and post-harvest shelf life test with ease – and without any sign of petal damage or loss. These chrysanthemums are delivered in a net – not to prevent any damage but simply to get enough of these large flowers into their box. This unique flower with its high petal count, sturdy stems and beautiful green leaves has already reaped rave reviews. With the introduction of Magnum, Deliflor is taking a new step in chrysanthemums. Magnum will become available in quantities of around 40,000 stems a week early in April.

More information

www.deliflor.com, info@deliflor.com, www.facebook.com/deliflor

DELIFLOR

Chrysanten

Fresh Choices TREND-SETTING TIPS FOR BUYING FRESH CUT FLOWERS AND GREENS

BEGUILING BULBS

➤ Last month, on the eve before Winter Storm Stella blanketed the Northeast and mid-Atlantic with snow, I spied multiple Facebook and Instagram posts from friends — not a professional florist among them — who made sure they had flowers before hunkering down. Among my favorite captions: “I’ve got my buds to keep me warm” (beneath a shot of tulips) and “bread, milk, daffodils.”

Emblematic of spring and rebirth, bulb flowers seem to revitalize even the dreariest of dispositions. “They’re definite crowd pleasers,” said Kathy Dudley, owner of The Bloomery in Butler, Pennsylvania, who grows and sells cut flowers in the Pittsburgh area. “Everyone’s so happy when they return. They practically sell themselves!” Even in sunny Sarasota, Florida, where temperatures seldom drop below 60 F, people go crazy for bulb flowers. Beneva Flowers & Gifts recently featured daffodils in the shop’s “Twenty Dollar Tuesday” special and sold out by 10 a.m. “Customers recognize that they’re seasonal, just like peonies, which gives them incredible value,” explained Doris Jolly, vice president of weddings

and events. Additionally, she said, the city has many retirees who moved from up north and feel nostalgic remembering the start of springs gone by.

Designers share consumers’ affection for bulb flowers. “Tulips, with their continued stem and flower growth, add a great flowing line,” said renowned designer and educator René van Rems, AIFD. Vince Butera, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, speaks about irises in similar terms. “Their long, slender stems lend an artistic touch that’s especially good for Asian-inspired designs,” said the owner of Butera the Florist in York, Pennsylvania. That said, he’s not averse to cutting irises down to place in low-mounded designs. “For a recent party, I paired irises and hyacinth with hydrangeas and large roses in a short glass cylinder,” he said. “The bulbs provided great visual texture against the fluffy blooms.”

Here’s a round up of bright, beautiful bulb flowers to put a spring in your step. 🌷

Katie Hendrick is a contributing writer of Floral Management. khendrick@safnow.org



‘CARLTON’ DAFFODIL
Byfod.com



‘PAPERWHITE’ DAFFODIL
Byfod.com



RED AMARYLLIS
Holland America Flowers



WHITE AMARYLLIS
Holland America Flowers



‘GALAXY’ FREESIA
Holland America Flowers



‘SAVILLA’ FREESIA
Holland America Flowers

Fresh Choices



'SANTORINI' FREESIA
Holland America Flowers



'TROUVADOUR' FREESIA
Holland America Flowers



'ANTARCTICA' HYACINTH
Oregon Flowers



PURPLE FREESIA
Skyline Flowers



'AIOLES' HYACINTH
Sun Valley Farms



'BLUE GIANT' HYACINTH
Sun Valley Farms



'SPLENDID CORNELIA' HYACINTH
Sun Valley Farms



'ANNA LIZA' HYACINTH
Sun Valley Farms



'BREST' FANCY TULIP
Sun Valley Farms



'PACIFIC PEARL' FANCY TULIP
Sun Valley Farms



'CASA BLANCA' IRIS
Sun Valley Farms



'HONG KONG' IRIS
Sun Valley Farms



'NEVADA' IRIS
Sun Valley Farms



'SKY DIVER' IRIS
Sun Valley Farms



'TELSTAR' IRIS
Sun Valley Farms



**"We try to
respond to every
communication from
any customer in less than
10 minutes, 24 hours a
day, seven days a week,
365 days a year."**

HOWARD HURST

BY MARY WESTBROOK

Superlative service is the new normal: faster, smarter, smoother. Can you deliver?

BEYOND IMPRESSED

It was the brunch heard around the world. Or, at least, around the Internet.

In March, Cat Deeley, an English actress, singer and model, ate at Tom George in Los Angeles, and the swanky hot spot did not live up to her expectations. Deeley did what disgruntled customers everywhere do these days: She took to Twitter to complain about the food (“terrible”), the manager (a “moron”; an “amateur”) and the overall restaurant (“disgusting”; “the worst”).

Since Deeley is a celebrity — she co-hosts the TV show, “So You Think You Can Dance?” — media outlets, including People and Glamour, picked up her Twitter rant, amplifying her complaints. In a matter of hours, Tom George, which the foodie website, Eater, described last October as “seriously beautiful” with “dapper Italian flair,” became linked in the minds of millions of people with Deeley’s single disappointing meal.

And maybe the brunch was a bust — the food overcooked, the waitstaff frazzled, the manager in a surly mood. (Her waiter, for his part, pushed back against Deeley’s version of the story.) The truth is, what actually happened during that two- or three-hour period doesn’t matter. Deeley, the customer, was disappointed, and she let lots of people hear about it, fast.

Celebrities may not walk through your door (or navigate to your website) to buy flowers, but all of your customers have platforms aplenty to air their grievances should you disappoint them. When something goes wrong, a miffed customer can tell family members, friends, co-workers and strangers all about that experience in a matter of seconds. What’s more, customers today are comparing you to every other business, not just other retailers, ac-

cording to Shep Hyken, an expert in customer service, and frequent contributor to Forbes magazine.

“Someone goes to a luxury hotel and has an amazing experience, and then she heads to her local florist and she expects the same level of service,” he said, subconsciously or not. “Florists aren’t competing anymore against other florists or gift providers. They’re being compared to everyone who delivers any kind of service. Period.”

That includes places such as Amazon (vast warehouses and one- or two-hour delivery) and Nordstrom (high-end offerings and generous return policies), along with Zappos and Zara’s (high-tech inventory systems a local florist can only dream of). Gulp.

And yet, florists know how to provide great service. The industry is built on a foundation of service: helping people express emotions, making them comfortable, providing support in times of joy and sorrow. New tools and new tech may heighten consumers’ expectations (and certainly, make them less patient), but these shifts, say customer service pros and many seasoned florists, also provide new opportunities — chances to dazzle and overwhelm, to seal a deal and turn a fair-weather customer into a lifelong loyalist.

There’s real money to be gained from being the business that does the dazzling. Hyken pointed to a NewVoiceMedia report that found that some \$62 billion were lost in 2015 because of poor customer service. A flawless customer experience or mistakes that are quickly corrected not only increase loyalty and sales, but ultimately compel today’s consumer to “share” and gush online. This month, we talked to florists, along with experts from outside the industry, about how to get more raves from your customers.



GANG’S ALL

HERE At Tipton & Hurst, there’s a 10-foot rule. As soon as a customer steps inside, any employee is empowered and expected to say hello. Pictured l to r: Howard Hurst, president; Ann Gunti, controller; Chris Norwood, vice president; Freda Rice, flower manager.

> BEYOND IMPRESSED

OFF THE CLOCK

Frank Gallo, of Frank Gallo & Son Florist in upstate New York, offers extended hours for delivery and tightly edits his website offerings, particularly around the holidays.

Bob Aykens, AAF, of Memorial Florists & Greenhouses said that he's constantly rethinking policies and procedures, looking for inefficiencies that can drain profits and create pain points in the buying process.

RANT GETTER: Slow service**RAVE EARNER: Streamlined processes, new options**

Let's return to that \$62 billion figure for a minute. That number, Hyken pointed out, is up 50 percent from 2013 (when NewVoiceMedia conducted a similar study).

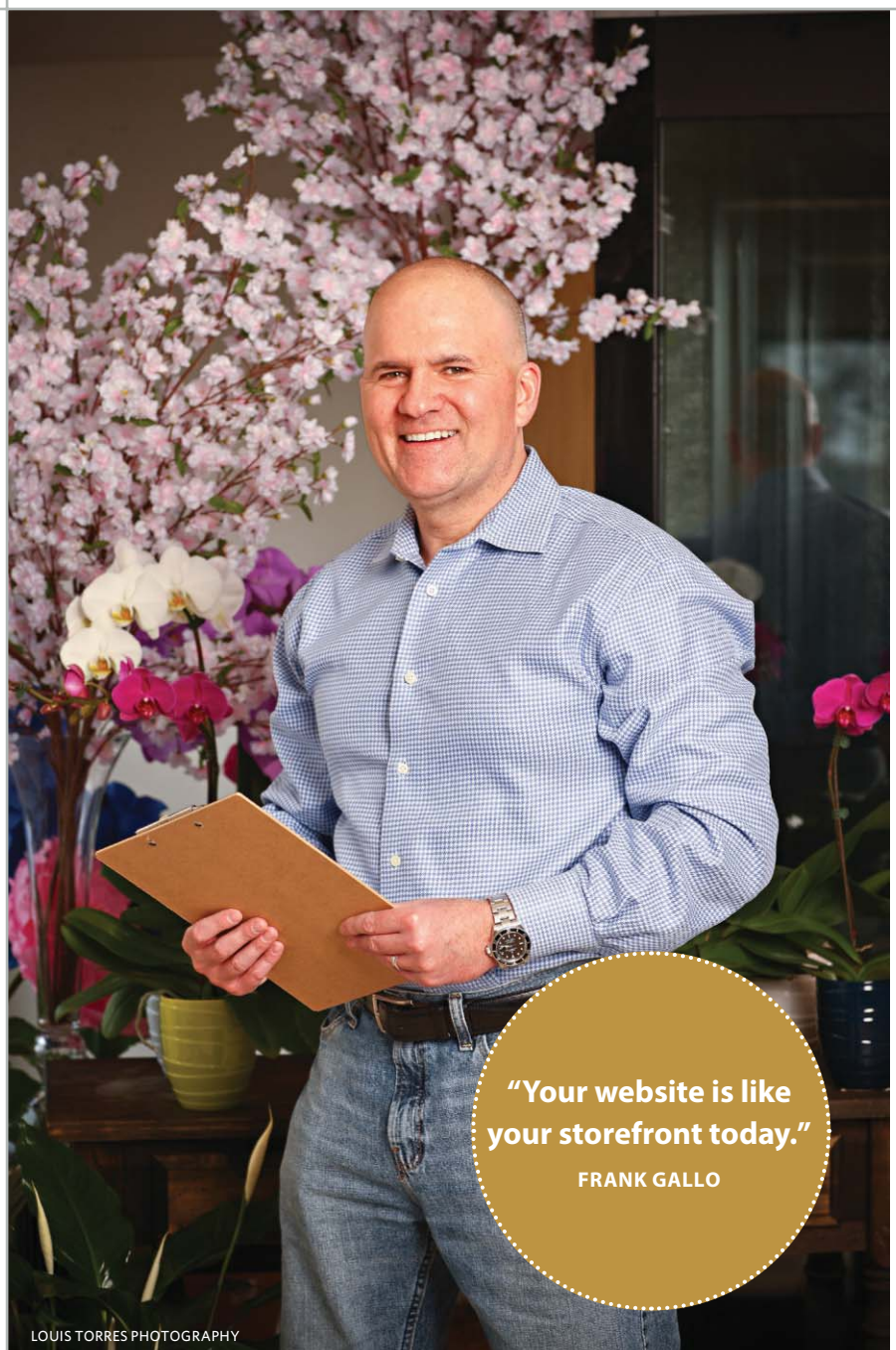
"I don't think that [increase] means customer service is getting worse," he added. "I think it means that the bar is getting higher and higher."

In other words, customers expect more. Chief among those expectations: They want the buying process — every step of it, whether they're shopping in-store, online or by phone — to be easy.

That means that websites need to be edited (and optimized for mobile), showrooms have to be organized, team members must be cross-trained, and policies that force you to say no to a customer should be changed so that you can say "yes" more often. (Compare: "Sorry. We can't get that design to your daughter today," to "Sure! We can get that design to your daughter today through our rush delivery, for \$XX.")

In Appleton, Wisconsin, Bob Aykens, AAF, of Memorial Florists & Greenhouses said that he's constantly rethinking policies and procedures, looking for inefficiencies that can drain profits and create pain points in the buying process.

"Any system or procedure that is complicated for our staff is going to



**"Your website is like
your storefront today."**

FRANK GALLO

LOUIS TORRES PHOTOGRAPHY



ALWAYS IMPROVING

In Appleton, Wisconsin, Bob Aykens has been working on a draft document that fully captures his philosophy on customer service. He's also engaged help in the past year from a third-party to improve his online brand and social media presence.

be complicated for our customers," Aykens explained.

Recently, for instance, he's been revamping the business's delivery department, significantly streamlining the fee structure and reducing the overall number of zones.

Aykens, who plans to have this new system fully implemented by Mother's Day this year, said that his own goal has been twofold. He wants to make delivery more profitable, but he also wants delivery procedures to be easier for staff — and, therefore, customers. (Though, admittedly, there is a learning curve for staff with the new system, he said.)

"It's always a balance," between profitability and customer service, he said. "We've been profitable in delivery in the past, but I know we can do better," while providing in some cases faster service.

In fact, many florists say they've adjusted delivery practices to provide better service — easier and, often, faster. Call it the Amazon Prime and Prime Now effect: Consumers around the country are growing accustomed to finding items online, buying them and having them in their homes in a matter of hours. Aykens, for his part, has been experimenting lately with using Uber drivers for late-in-the-day deliveries, rush orders that come in after the main work is done and Aykens already has sent his drivers home.

For an additional fee, Frank Gallo, of Frank Gallo & Son Florist in upstate New York, offers delivery before 9 a.m. and after 6 p.m. In the past five years, he's also added two delivery vehicles to his fleet, and invested in updated GPS tech-

nology, so that orders can get out faster and more efficiently.

Online, Gallo — and many other florists — are working to create tighter edits and narrow selections so that customers aren't overwhelmed with options, particularly in the run-up to a major holiday such as Mother's Day. That's a good idea, said Hyken, who added, "A confused customer doesn't buy." (He's also quick to add, "That doesn't mean a typical customer doesn't like options." Be sure to allow customers who *do* want to browse to see other pages on your site and your social media platforms.)

"It's become a cliché to say this, but your website is like your storefront today," Gallo said. "Having a concise menu of items is crucial. At holiday time, we go in and edit the amount of items that we have available. It makes it much more streamlined and more efficient." It also makes the buying process less complicated for the customer.

At Monday Morning Flower & Balloon Co. Inc., Princeton, New Jersey, Georgianne and Kevin Vinicombe have started placing more emphasis on employee cross-training, to ensure that each member of their 14-person team is equipped to field just about any customer concern or need.

"For a while, our employees were becoming more specialized," Georgianne said, "but [today] we need our team members to fill different roles, so that customers aren't sitting around waiting for me to come out of a wedding consultation." (Read more about Vinicombe's approach to employee management on p. 16.)

RANT GETTER: Unresolved mistakes

RAVE EARNER: Prompt, public responses

One trend that's very clear in customer service: Customers now have the ability to reach out to businesses through an untold number of platforms, not only via phone and email, but also social media messaging, texts and independent apps. And those messages aren't coming in exclusively during business hours.

In Little Rock, Arkansas, Tipton & Hurst's eight-member management team takes an all-hands-on-deck approach to fielding customer inquiries and complaints. Messages sent to the company's primary email (comments@tiptonhurst.com), voicemails, social media pings and online review notifications are automatically delivered to all eight people. During business hours, the person who sees the message first responds to it (and sends a note to the other team members, alerting them that the situation is under control). Outside of work hours, one manager is always "on call" to respond.

"We try to respond to every communication from any customer in less than 10 minutes, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year," said Howard Hurst.

When a customer thinks that Tipton & Hurst has goofed, the company goes above and beyond to try to make things right, Hurst added. The company's guar-

> BEYOND IMPRESSED

HANDCRAFTED At Monday Morning Flower & Balloon Co. in Princeton, New Jersey, designs include special tags designating which team member created the arrangement.



Eight Ideas to Try Now

Customer service is a big topic, its finer points hard to pin down. (Really, *everything* you do relates to service, right? Florists are in the service industry.) In that spirit, here are eight ideas florists have implemented to improve service — practical, tangible ideas — that you can borrow and put into place right away.

- 1 Be Generous.** Don't put yourself in the position of haggling with customers who already feel wronged. In Little Rock, Tipton & Hurst offers a generous guarantee on all designs. "A lot of times we'll give customers a gift card of equal value," explained Howard Hurst. If they redeem that gift card, the shop can shine (and recapture what might have been a lost customer). Still, research shows that few customers ever redeem gift cards, Hurst noted — a stat that adds more fuel to the "be generous" argument. (What do you have to lose?)
- 2 Reward Positive Behavior.** Customers who provide you with feedback are doing your business a huge favor. Reward them, Hurst said. His company, for instance, enters customers who complete surveys into a drawing for a gift card. Last Valentine's Day, Tipton & Hurst received 300 responses.
- 3 Mind your Greetings.** Do your employees greet customers who come into the store? Before you roll your eyes and say, "of course," consider another question: Have you trained all of your employees to greet customers? At Tipton & Hurst, there's a 10-foot rule, Hurst said. Once a customer sets foot in the door, any employee who is within 10 feet of that customer needs to offer a quick greeting — it doesn't matter if the employee is a part-time worker, manager, or design or sales team member. "Customers need to be greeted and need to feel welcome," Hurst said. In a similar vein, all Tipton & Hurst employees wear lo-

goed clothes, so customers can quickly identify who is on staff.

- 4 Meet, Train, Repeat.** When it comes to delivering great customer service, don't take any lessons for granted, Hurst said. He and his team meet regularly to talk about new services, products and complaints. Training requires that repetition, he argued, especially in the lead-up to a major holiday, when things around the store can become frantic. "My son's a college golfer, and his coach told him you need to hit the same shot 100 times every day so that you can hit that same shot under pressure," Hurst said. "It's the same thing with service; it needs to be automatic."
- 5 Focus on Details.** Hurst also trains his sales team to confirm every detail for phone orders. "We train them to review the information and say, 'Does that sound good, have I got everything correct?'" he said. "Ninety percent of the issues related to complaints come down to communication. If you get all the details right, you are 90 percent done." Again, this may sound like common sense, but unless you are reinforcing the importance of double-checking to your staff, you can't be sure that critical task is happening.
- 6 Personalize Every Experience.** Florists have a huge competitive advantage when it comes to making gifts personal, said Jen Rodstrom, of the Temken Group, a research, consulting and training firm specializing in customer service. Never miss an opportunity to flaunt your local roots, or to remind customers that you are a local, family business, staffed by real people. In Princeton, New Jersey, Georgianne Vinicombe sends a letter to new customers, welcoming them to Monday Morning Flower & Balloon Co., and includes a "designed by" card with the designer's name and photo for each

arrangement. Her shop also sends follow-up letters to recipients ("We hope you enjoyed your gift and we'd love to help with your future gift-giving needs."), along with "we miss you" letters for customers who haven't ordered in nine months. The shop also uses personal phone calls for delivery confirmation.

- 7 Start with a Smile.** In upstate New York, Frank Gallo trains his staff to answer the phone with a smile. It makes a difference, he insisted. "For florists, face-to-face interactions with customers are a pretty small percentage of business," he said. "Our rule is: You answer the phone with a smile and an upbeat tone. Customers can tell."
- 8 Be a Big Thinker.** Articulating your overall philosophy on service probably falls pretty darn low on your to-do list; but in Appleton, Wisconsin, Bob Aykens has been dedicating more time to putting his thoughts on paper. Inspired by the book, "Kemo Sabe Wisdom: Practical Ways to Help Your Business Succeed," by Tom Yoder, Aykens is currently putting the finishing touches on a comprehensive document that addresses corporate culture and standards. The document will cover his mission statement, along with things that every employee needs to do (greet customers, use people's names, walk people to products, rather than pointing them in a general direction, etc.). Aykens said that he hopes that document helps him address a challenge that many floral industry members face: high turnover. "Ten years ago, 70 percent of my staff had been with me with 25 years or more, but that's not the case anymore," he said. "Now, if you get two years out of somebody, that's pretty good." The manual, he said, could help instill more consistency across his team, and build up the workplace culture. - **M.W.**

Georgianne and Kevin Vinicombe send a letter to new customers, welcoming them to Monday Morning Flower & Balloon Co., and includes a “designed by” card with the designer’s name and photo for each arrangement.



ALL THINGS, ALL PEOPLE

Georgianne and Kevin Vinicombe of Monday Morning Flower & Balloon Co. cross-train employees to help provide better, more consistent service.

antee policy promises 100 percent customer satisfaction, and Hurst also wants all of his employees, not just the managers, to feel “empowered,” to take ownership of any mistake and any correction, he explained. Indeed, the company’s tag line, prominently displayed online and on marketing materials reads, “Guaranteed satisfaction since 1886.”

“I tell everybody that comes to work for us, ‘I am giving you full authority and responsibility to do whatever it takes to satisfy the customer,’” he said, including refunds, gift cards, new designs and, occasionally, all of the above. “I want raving fans, customers who feel indebted and amazed. They’re going to be the ones who tell other people about us.”

Responding quickly is especially important when it comes to online reviews, said Jen Rodstrom, of the Temken Group, a research, consulting and training firm specializing in customer service. She recommends that companies respond to all reviews, positive and negative, and “indicate if they’ve made any improvements based on that [customer] feedback.”

“That way, anyone else who comes to check out the reviews can see that the florist is invested and taking [the comment] seriously,” she said.

Hyken agreed.

“Every comment should be responded to, and responded to quickly, preferably in minutes,” he said. “If you have a negative review, reach out [to the customer] and say, ‘Wow, it’s obvious you weren’t happy. I want to fix this for you.’”

Once you’ve made things right offline, he added, return to the thread and thank the customer in that same forum for allowing you to fix the problem.

“Ideally, the customer will close the loop and thank you,” ensuring that any future customers who happen upon the initial negative comment will also see that happy resolution.

By the way, Hyken added that there’s no need to fret over a less-than-perfect star rating on Yelp, Google, Facebook, or any other site. In fact, a study from Northwestern University found that consumers tend to see businesses that have perfect ratings as less than credible — many consumers are even suspicious of businesses with only raves. (They wonder if the business might be paying for

those glowing reviews, in violation of site policies, or asking friends/neighbors to weigh in with fake reviews.) The “ideal” review, the study found, is closer to 4.2.

“People want to see complaints,” Hyken said. More to the point, “they want to see how you respond to complaints.”

Yelp, in particular, has been a thorn in the sides of many small-business owners. (Google “Why do small-business owners hate Yelp?” and you’ll see pages of results, most of them very familiar to florists.) Chief complaints about the site: a process that some say makes removing fake reviews cumbersome, an algorithm that can feel downright mysterious, and an over-emphasis on bad experiences. (Customers who are miffed are just more likely to post.)

Aykens said he’s experienced the headache of Yelp firsthand, which is part of the reason he engaged a third-party to help manage his shop’s online presence and brand. (Keep reading for more on that.)

“I think, like a lot of florists, we were doing a subpar job with social media for a while,” he said.

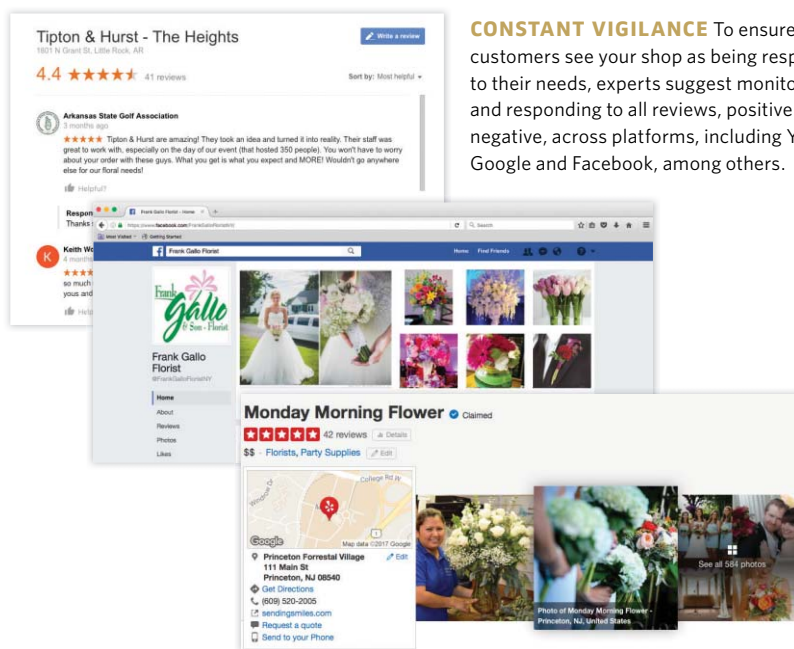
Caught up in the rigors daily work demands, online reviews would go unanswered for days or even weeks. Aykens knew that situation was unsustainable, which is why the business has a more proactive approach today.

“Next to quality, customer service is the most important thing,” he said. “So when we weren’t handling [online complaints] well, that’s the kind of thing that was keeping me up at night.”

Moreover, Yelp receives about 145 million unique visitors a month, according to DMR, which tracks digital marketing stats. Small-business owners ignore or write off the site at their peril, said Rodstrom, who urges retailers to take a two-pronged approach with Yelp: Respond to every comment, and encourage customers who are happy with your business to take their compliments and post them publicly.

“Our research shows that consumers are much more vocal about bad experiences than good experiences,” she said. “So we’d encourage florists to actively ask their customers who have a positive experience to post on Yelp, because [those customers] might not even be thinking about it, but would be delighted to when asked.”

> BEYOND IMPRESSED



CONSTANT VIGILANCE To ensure that customers see your shop as being responsive to their needs, experts suggest monitoring and responding to all reviews, positive and negative, across platforms, including Yelp, Google and Facebook, among others.

Create a 'Customer-Centric' Culture

Shep Hyken, a bestselling author and expert in customer service, said the letter D may conjure images of near-failing grades in school, but, for retailers who want to create a "customer-centric culture," there are six "D's" to remember. He recently shared those points on his website hyken.com:

Define it. "Customer service is part of your brand promise," Hyken explained. "It is what you want your employees to deliver. It is what you want the customer to experience. Make it clear and make it simple." For example, he added, "Ace Hardware, known for their customer service, is known as the 'Helpful Hardware Place.' They have defined customer service as being helpful, and in their hiring, training and customer interactions, they make it clear that helpful is what they are all about."

Disseminate it. "Don't keep it a secret," he said. "Just because you've defined the customer service experience, at this point, it's just lip service. Now you must train your employees on how to deliver it. The Ritz Carlton hotel chain has laminated cards with their 'credo' and several other important core values, printed on it. Each employee carries the card with them, and in many cases, has memorized it."

Deploy it. "It's time to execute," Hyken said. "The employees have been trained. Now it is time to implement and act on the customer service initiative. Everyone must know it and be on board with it — even people who don't have any contact with your customers. They have internal customers whom they support. Customer service is everyone's job."

Demonstrate it. "Now that everyone knows it and has been trained, everyone must demonstrate it," he explained. "Leaders must, through their actions, show everyone how it's done. And everyone else should do the same. Everyone becomes a role model for how to deliver amazing customer service."

Defend it. "If you see someone doing anything contrary to what you want the customer to experience, you step in to help," he said. "This isn't about reprimanding or calling someone out for doing something wrong. This is a teaching opportunity, and treated as such, creates a culture that comfortably empowers employees to deliver great customer service."

Delight in it. "Take pride and delight in the success you have with your customers," he said. "Celebrate the success of the company, and individuals who have demonstrated amazing customer service." — **M.W.**

Hyken advocates a similar approach. "Don't buy [a positive post]. Don't beg for it. Don't grovel," he said. "When people say, 'You guys are so friendly,' you should immediately say, 'Thank you so much! Can you please mention that on Yelp?'"

Yelp, for the record, discourages business owners from asking directly for reviews but doing so is not a violation of the site's Terms of Service, according to Brian Patterson of Marketing Land, who investigated the issue last year. Paying customers to post or remove a review is a violation.

Many experts also suggest asking customers to consider removing negative reviews, or amending them, once a complaint has been resolved.

And, if monitoring and responding to online reviews constantly feels like too high a bar for your business, remember that third-party companies are available to help lighten the load. About a year ago, Aykens signed on with one such company (Bloomerang Solutions, founded by former florist Art Conforti, PFCI), a decision, he said, "made a world of sense," considering the potential investment of time and energy all the platforms require.

"It's like having a police officer to manage the flow," Aykens said, noting that he has worked closely with the company to shape responses, and still frequently responds on his own to specific complaints.

RANT GETTER: Business that's taken for granted

RAVE EARNER: Asking for feedback — and showing thanks

Want to know what customers *really* think about your business? Ask them.

"Small businesses have a huge advantage as far as knowing who their customers are," Rodstrom said. "They know their customers personally, can develop a real rapport with them, and can truly understand their needs. They can make the extra effort to know customers' preferences, special occasions, favorite flowers, etc. Especially in an industry like flowers, those extra niceties can make a big difference."

Customer surveys, through companies such as SurveyMonkey or InstantSurvey, also can help retailers capture more realistic views of customers' experiences, said Hyken. The catch? They need to be conducted correctly.

"Surveys need to be sent as close to the purchasing event as possible," he said. "And they need to be really, really simple. It should never take longer to complete the survey than it did to complete the order."

Hyken recommends using a simple numeric system, from one to five, or one to 10, to rate the overall experience, along with one or two follow-ups. ("What would it take for us to raise our rating by one number?" is a question he likes.) Open-ended questions ("Why?") also can encourage customers to share detailed feedback.

Hurst has been sending out customer surveys for about two years, and says he's come to rely on them. Customers receive a survey link with every purchase, and those who respond are entered into a monthly drawing for a \$100 gift card. The shop has had 2,300 surveys returned since it started using the program; on Valentine's Day 2017 alone, 300 people completed surveys, out of the roughly 3,000 who received them.

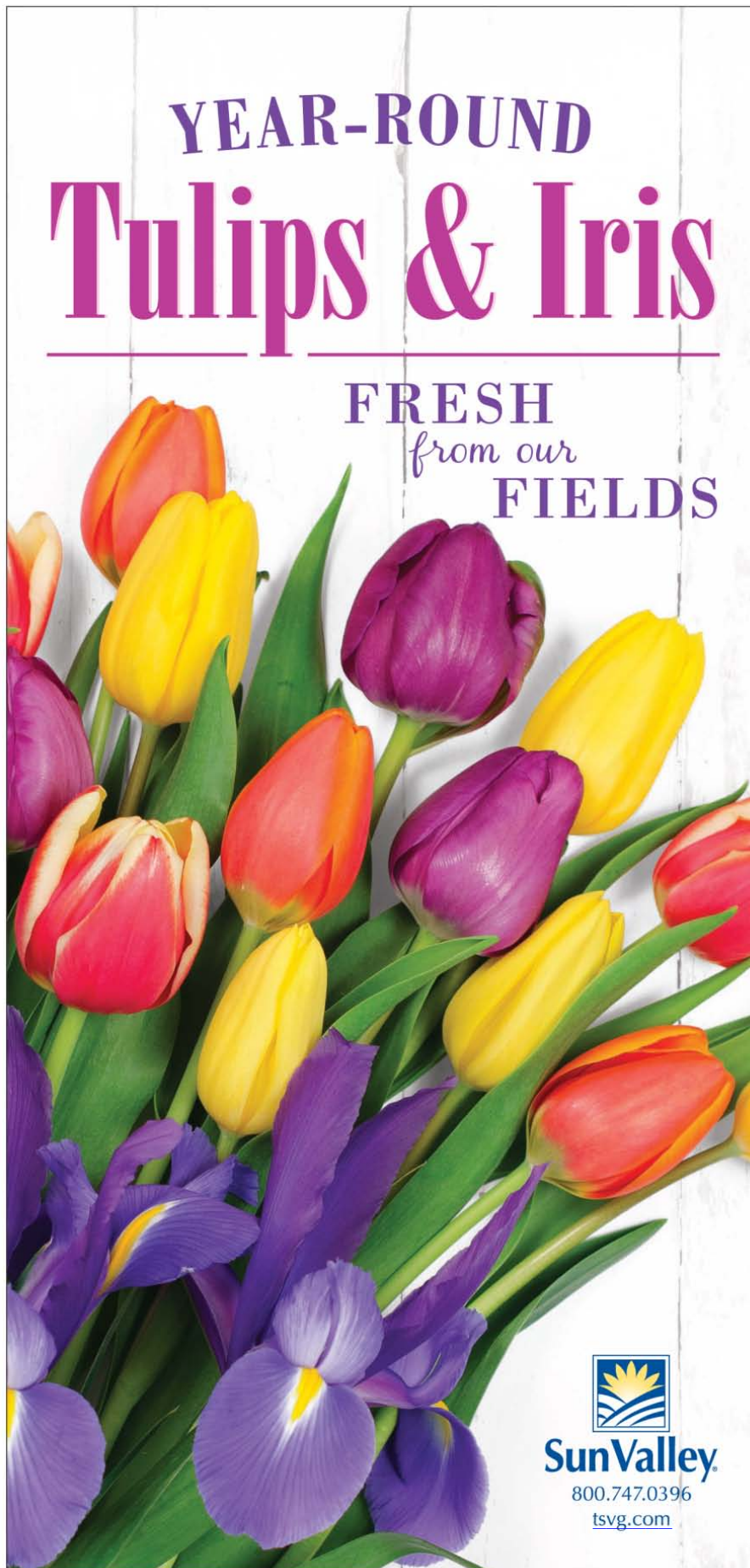
While the vast majority of responses—"99 percent"—are positive, Hurst said that the surveys provide additional opportunities to make mistakes right, and to have meaningful, memorable conversations with customers. He, for instance, regularly calls customers to thank them for positive survey responses, and for taking the time to pass along kudos regarding his staff.

"I'll call a customer up and say, 'Miss Jones, that was so nice of you recognize Barbara,'" he said. "'I've shown her your comment, and I just really wanted to say we appreciate you recognizing that good service.' Customers tend to remember that, and the staff likes the recognition."

Both Vinicombe and Aykens take a similar approach: Vinicombe sends out surveys weekly, and Aykens sends them out at the end of every month.


"I always gain something that we can improve on," Aykens said. "Or I'll get five or six things that we can share with staff as compliments." 🌸

Mary Westbrook is the senior contributing editor for the Society of American Florists. mwestbrook@safnow.org



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TELLING THE INDUSTRY'S STORY



Among the nearly 120 floral industry members who braved the snow for CAD: **Oscar Fernandez**, Equiflor/Rio Roses; **Corrine Heck**, Details Flowers; **David and Pat Armellini**, Armellini Express Lines; **Sharon Roeser**, **Alex Atwood** and (front and center, bent over) **Liza Atwood**, Fifty Flowers; **Patricia and Glenn Sprich**, Baisch & Skinner Wholesale; **Jodi McShan**, McShan Florist; **Jamie Kitz**, Sakata; **Norman Northen**, TMFA, and **Dianna Nordman**, Texas State Florists Association, **Mollie Meulenbroek**, Studley Flower Gardens; **Chris Drummond**, AAF, Plaza Flowers; **Susie and Nicole Palazzo**, City Line Florist Inc.



BY MARY WESTBROOK

Neither the threat of snow nor extreme partisanship could keep SAF members from advocating for the floral industry.

When 119 growers, wholesalers, retailers and suppliers gathered March 13-14 in Washington, D.C., for SAF's 37th Annual Congressional Action Days (CAD), they received some straightforward advice on meeting with lawmakers and legislative aides: Tell your story. It can make a real difference.

"Civil discussions lead to meaningful change," said SAF President-Elect Bill Doran, as he welcomed CAD attendees. "Lawmakers can't make decisions without hearing from a broad swath of people."

For Liza Roeser Atwood of Fifty Flowers in Boise, Idaho, putting that advice into practice was easy. Earlier this year, she and her team were forced to turn away orders after they failed to find laborers to help harvest seeded eucalyptus. So when Atwood joined with the other members of the Idaho delegation, she used that story to illustrate the industry's critical need for practical solutions to the country's current, broken immigration system — and her story hit home.

"That really opened their eyes that there is a crisis," said Atwood, a longtime floral industry member but first-time CAD attendee who said she was motivated this year to attend because she wanted to help effect lasting change. "I'm here talking with the lawmakers who when they get to the floor can stand up and vote for our business, to keep it in business."

Despite the threat of a major snowstorm, CAD drew its largest crowd in more than a decade, with 35 first-time attendees and a total delegation representing 30 states. Many SAF members who traveled to Capitol Hill on March 14 to meet with lawmakers and key staff members said they found people to be more receptive this year to the industry's issues — tax reform, immigration reform and increased funding for the Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative (FNRI). Some credited that change to the new administration; others said the possibility of snow, which threatened the D.C. area but ended up hitting harder farther north, helped clear the halls of Congress, giving aides and lawmakers a little more time to spend in meetings.

> TELLING THE INDUSTRY'S STORY

"I found people were looking for information — they were very interested," said Paul Fowle of DVFlora in Miami, Florida.

Indeed, minutes after he and the New Jersey delegation left one representative's office, they received an email from aide, reminding them to send follow-up information on FNRI, and why the floral industry needs the government's help in bringing that private-public initiative back to its previous funding levels.

"The fair share argument worked," he added.

Paul Brockway, AAF, of Conklyn's Florist in Alexandria, Virginia, noted that the pre-meeting prep from SAF experts helped his group feel ready to meet with lawmakers and staff. He was pleasantly surprised to find staff members who were informed and ready to listen.

"Turns out that the staffers were well aware of the issues, leaving us ample time to tell our stories and explain how our positions affect the industry, our state and the future of the world as we know it," he said.

Nancy Hooper of Norton's Flowers and Gifts in Ypsilanti, Michigan, a fourth-time CAD attendee, also noted a shift in his reception on the Hill this year.

"Previously, it seemed we would always get 'no,'" she said. "[Lawmakers and staff] would agree but always tell



THE ISSUES

This year, the SAF delegation focused its energy on three core issues, tax reform, immigration reform and industry research funding, asking their lawmakers to:

- Support comprehensive **tax reform** by simplifying the tax code and reducing rates, but excluding imported floral agricultural products from a border adjustment tax.
- Oppose stand-alone mandatory **E-Verify legislation**, including S.179, the "Accountability Through Electronic Verification Act," which SAF's Senior Director of Government Relations Shawn McBurney said would "cripple our agricultural economy."
- Include a \$250,000 increase for the **Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative** in their formal requests to the Appropriations Committees.



1. Illinois delegates **Ed Cronin**, FTD, Inc.; **Jennifer Zurko**, Ball Horticultural Company; **Jenna, Megan and Dave Mitchell**, AAF, Mitchell's Flowers and Events; **Mike Klopmeier**, Ph.D., Darwin Perennials; **Marvin Miller**, Ph.D., Ball Horticultural Company. **2.** Ohio delegates **Jason Waits**, Bloomtastic; **Karen Oie**, Smithers-Oasis; **Debbie Straub**, Floralife, and a congressional aide. **3.** Florida delegates from left: **Ben Powell**, Mayesh; **David Armellini**, Armellini Express Lines; **Mike Valade**, Teleflora, Inc.; **Patricia Armellini**; and **Corrine Heck**, Details Flowers. **4.** **Brad and Cheryl Denham**, Arizona Family Florist, with an aide in Sen. John McCain's (R-Ariz) office. **5.** **Mark Yelanich**, Metrolina Greenhouses; **Dana and Emma Cook**, Julia's Florist and (standing) a congressional aide in the office of Senator Richard Burr (R-N.C.). **6.** An Illinois congressional aide soaks in the issues from **Mike Klopmeier**, Ph.D., and **Mona Haberer**, Hortica. **7.** **David Clark**, Syndicate Sales, and son, John. **8.** From right: **Liza Roser Atwood**, **Sharon Roser** and **Alex Atwood** in the office of Sen. Michael D. Crapo (R-Idaho). **9.** Oregon delegates **Scott Isensee**, Frank Adams Wholesale Florist; **Shirley Lyons**, AAF, PFCI, Dandelions Flowers and Gifts; **Helene and Martin Meskers**, Oregon Flowers, and a congressional aide. **10.** Michigan delegates **Tim Galea**, Norton's Flowers & Gifts; and **Rod Crittenden**, Michigan Floral Association.



> TELLING THE INDUSTRY'S STORY

EXPERT SPEAKERS

Congressional Action Days attendees didn't head to Capitol Hill before getting briefed on the industry's issues and how best to convey them to their legislators. Here are a few highlights:



Stephanie Vance of Advocacy Associates helped attendees practice their pitch before the meetings on Capitol Hill. She cautioned SAF members that they might end up walking alongside junior aides on the way to other meetings, or getting only a few quick moments — but she also said that with a strong argument and great story, every second counts. Another tip from Vance: Always follow up. Invite lawmakers to your business, she said.



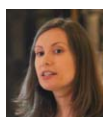
"It's so important for you to go to the Hill and make sure members know what's important to you," emphasized small business attorney **Jessica Summers**, of Paley Rothman.



Joe Bischoff, Ph.D., one of SAF's lobbyists with Cornerstone Government Affairs, explained the ins and outs of Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative funding; CAD participants asked lawmakers on Tuesday to support a "modest" increase that would restore the fund to earlier levels. "[FNRI] is a partnership between industry, the academic community and the federal government," he said. "We're not just asking for money from the government. It's about leveraging dollars."



Jim Carter, vice president of government affairs at Emerson, a diversified global manufacturing and technology company based in St. Louis, Missouri, and a tax reform adviser on the Trump Transition Team, briefed attendees on tax reform on Monday. "This administration is more attune to checking off campaign promises than others," he said. Tax reform is something [President Trump] campaigned on. I would be shocked if we didn't have something this year."



While trade was not a key issue for CAD this year, because the new administration is focused on trade, **Alice Gomez**, one of SAF's lobbyists with Cornerstone Government Affairs, made a brief presentation on the president's position on high-profile agreements, including Nafta, which could ultimately affect floral industry members.



PLENTY OF PREP Congressional Action Days attendees had plenty of time to prepare for their meetings on the Hill, during a breakfast and a legislative briefing, where they sat with attendees from their states. **Top: Dianna Nordman**, Texas State Florists Association, and **Jo Buttram**, Shirley's Flowers & Gifts in Rogers, Arkansas. **Center left: Jamie Kitz** (left), Sakata, Morgan Hill, California; **Joost Bongaerts**, Florabundance, Carpinteria, California. **Center right: Shirley Lyons**, AAF, PFCI, Dandelions Flowers & Gifts, Eugene, Oregon; and **Helene and Martin Meskers**, AAF, Oregon Flowers in Aurora. **Bottom: Jodi McShan**, center, McShan Florist, Dallas, visits with attendees from other states.





us, 'It's impossible.' For the most part this year, we saw a lot of agreement and support."

Lee Sorensen, Design Master color tool, Inc., attending CAD for his second year, agreed.

"This year we had a lot more access and they were a lot more receptive, taking more notes," he explained. "We just got more time with them."

Alan Tanyoue of Floralife in Walterboro, South Carolina, said he too found "receptive" audiences in his lawmakers' offices, including that of Sen. Lindsey Graham (R - S.C.), where a counsel to the senator reaffirmed the legislator's commitment to comprehensive immigration reform. (This year, the SAF delegation lobbied specifically for fixes to the troubled E-Verify system.)

Longtime CAD participant **David Armellini** of Armellini Express Lines in Palm City, Florida, helped guide the Florida delegation in its discussions of the industry's effort to exclude imported floral agricultural products from a border adjustment tax, an issue that could have a "huge impact" on the Sunshine State, he said.

"We don't want to see flowers priced out of the market," he said, as the state group prepped for its meetings before heading to Congress. "We're prepared to walk on to the Hill and state our case."

Another member of the Florida delegation, **Corrine Heck** of Details Flowers in Ormond Beach, said she found it helpful to have experienced CAD participants like Armellini in the group, as she, a first-timer, learned the ins and outs of lobbying from **SAF and Beltway experts** and other industry members.

"I learned so much from the veterans from my state," she said. "I had many great takeaways, talked to so many wonderful business owners and really feel that it was a positive experience."

First-time attendees (and mother-daughter duo) **Sue and Nicole Palazzo** of City Line Florist in Trumbull, Connecticut, picked up a handy tip from SAF Chairman **Shirley Lyons, AAF, PFCI**, of Dandelion's Flowers & Gifts in Eugene, Oregon: Stop by all of your lawmakers' offices, even if you don't have an appointment. That approach — and a real hometown connection — paid off when they stopped by the office of Rep. Jim

Himes (D-Conn.) and Nicole noted that one of the staff members there was a customer of the shop. The mention got them a little unexpected face time.

"Big or small shops, we are all affected in one way or another with the issues that go on," said Nicole, adding that she plans to become a regular at the event.

Jeremy Lohman of Scott's House of Flowers in Lawton, Oklahoma, another first-time attendee, admitted that he was skeptical at first, unsure if CAD would be worth time away from the business.

"I initially thought that I could not make a difference, but after attending [CAD], I realize I can," he said, adding that he found conversations among industry members, who represented all segments of the supply chain, as beneficial as Capitol Hill meetings. "I was able to meet a variety of people in the industry and broaden my scope of knowledge."

First-timer **Larry White**, who has worked at Smithers-Oasis for 19 years, called CAD event a "bucket-list" item — a chance to "come to D.C. and actually participate ... in our legislative process."

That message is likely music to the ears of **Karen Fountain, AAF**, of Flowers 'n' Ferns in Burke, Virginia, who has been attending CAD for decades and recently wrote an impassioned Viewpoint in Floral Management on the importance of CAD.

"It's necessary for our senators and representatives to hear our stories about our businesses," Fountain said. "By going to Capitol Hill year after year, we establish ourselves as a leading association who takes pride in our industry. We gain their trust, which allows for more dialog by our SAF staff throughout the year."

And, for all the headlines about how contentious Washington has become, several CAD members who came to the event said they found moments of real inspiration, and even joy. That was the case for Paul Fowle, of Delaware Valley Floral Group, who happened upon a 100-person group representing Baptist churches across the country singing patriotic songs on the steps of the Supreme Court.

"I'll file that under 'something you don't see every day,'" he laughed. "It was a special memory from the trip." 🌿

Mary Westbrook is the senior contributing editor for the Society of American Florists.



DESIGN ROOM

Efficiency

BY DERRICK MYERS, CPA, CFP

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the sixteenth in an 18-month series that tackles essential flower shop accounting, financial management and benchmarking best practices. See previous columns in the digital archives, safnow.org/floralmanagement.



Why Does Design Room Efficiency Matter?

Efficiency is the root of high performance. If you don't provide an environment where your employees can function at full capacity, without unnecessary distractions, wasted motion or missing tools and equipment, they can't deliver the production you require to make your company profitable.

Florists, like other business owners, are always looking for ways to increase sales as the solution to all of their financial problems; however, if underlying processes are not running efficiently, then greater sales may just exacerbate the problem. So let's take the time to analyze the design room, where lost productivity can really hurt your bottom line.

What Makes Design Room Efficiency Tricky?

Flower shops don't run at peak efficiency for many reasons. Most important, few people take the time to study how designers spend their time at work. Are they diligently working at the design table or are they spending hours looking for flowers and supplies? Maybe they have to answer phones and wait on customers throughout the day or break up dedicated design time with trips to fill vases. Those trips and tasks add up. Every minute a designer is away from the design table costs you money.

No one understands the distractions and frustrations that the designers run into better than the designers themselves. That's why it's important to begin

any conversation with the designers. Ask them what tasks, processes and setups are causing wasted time. Let them help guide you toward the changes necessary to make things run more smoothly.

Still, don't forget to look at yourself and evaluate the impact that you have on your staff's use of time. Perhaps you are the root of some of their distractions. Do you often interrupt or redirect your key designers in a way that removes them from their primary functions? Often, our reliance on our key personnel can have a detrimental effect on their efficiency.

By being aware of your actions, watching what your designers actually do during the day and talking with them about where they are losing time, you will be able to find ways to save the

designer time and increase their time at the design table. This increased attentiveness will make the company more money and the designer more valuable, which ultimately means more money for them as well.

Best Practices

A first step to improved efficiency: Have your production, or designer output, goals clear at the beginning of the day. Each designer should know what his or her production level is — approximately 10 times their pay rate. Designers also must know any specific expectations and direction for the day, including any special events or arrangements that need their attention. Managers should use the “production levels” of their designer to extrapolate the design hours required to handle the anticipated production for the day, week and month, when making up work schedules. For example, a \$15-per-hour designer should produce \$1,200 of product (not counting delivery income) in an eight-hour shift (\$150 times eight hours).

Recipes and standardized designs can work wonders in this area. After all, the whole reason that anything gets standardized is to make its replication simpler and increase efficiency. Most florists already use this approach for holidays, but it works well for everyday designs, too. Having your head designers create standard arrangements, which can then be replicated by less skilled junior designers, will make your business much more profitable. Standardized arrangements on your website, and reducing the overall number of options, will also make production, purchasing and inventory more efficient. In addition, standard arrangements, at different price points, should find their way into your cooler. That way as soon as your designers have completed the day’s work, they can quickly identify what needs to be done to refill the cooler.

On a related note, don’t let designers design from flowers buckets. Have them pull flowers they need for the arrangements before they start to design, based on recipes or event planning notes. This will help them design more quickly, and they won’t stuff the arrangements. (Adding just one extra stem in each de-

sign can raise your costs by \$10,000 or more in a year.)

To pinpoint lost time or opportunities for improved efficiency, have your designers track their time for one busy or holiday week and one normal business week. Find out how often and for how long they leave the design table to get supplies, fill vases, answer phones, etc. Use this information to determine if it would be less costly and more productive to hire a helper/runner to assist your designers. Whenever possible in your shop, strive for a clear separation of duties. Having lower-paid employees answer phones, process and pull flow-ers, manage inventories and deal with customers will allow your higher-paid designers to function more efficiently and stay on task.

Make sure that the design area is organized and clean. I can’t tell you how many shops I have been in where there is stuff piled everywhere. This makes it difficult to navigate the store and almost impossible to find anything. Think about the time you waste in your shop looking for items you know you have — or worse, the money you waste replacing them. People function better in a clean, clutter-free environment. If you have clear, consistent organization, everyone knows where everything is. So if someone is out or the manager is busy, no one is held up waiting for answers or trying to find something. Clear aisles not only help with efficiency, they are imperative in regards to safety.

If possible have a water source at each design table. Much of the designer’s day can be lost walking back and forth to the sink to fill vases for arrangements. Having a source at their workstation is efficient and profitable.

Make sure that the designers have the proper tools and they are clean, sharp and in good working order. If those tools tend to wander, label each with the designer’s name.

Analyze the layout of your store and design room. Make sure that the space is being used as productively as possible. I have seen shop owners turn their business around simply by reconfiguring their store and giving the business a fresher, more streamlined and modern look that was also more efficient in its design.

In this age of technology I have seen different ways of handling technological interruptions, like cell phones and texting. It’s up to the owner/managers to decide what will work best at your shop. I have seen both extremes, meaning policies where no one is allowed to have cell phones at their workstation to policies where, not only are devices allowed, they are necessary for looking up designs online and even marking arrangements completed in the POS system. As long as production levels are where they belong, I would not worry too much about the occasional texting.

Don’t Do This:

Don’t simply allow your designers to set their own pace. It is human nature to make a task fill the time that you have available; therefore, you need to encourage your staff to look beyond the immediate task and be thinking about what’s next. For instance, make it standard practice that if a designer doesn’t have enough orders to keep them busy for the day, they should start working on filling the cooler.

Where possible, create an air of friendly competition so that your designers challenge each other to heights of higher production. Also consider stimulating production through the use of incentives. Just remember that incentives are still a part of payroll, and need to be processed as such and included when analyzing production results. Look for more on incentive-based pay in a future article. 🍀

Derrick P. Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI, is president of **Crockett, Myers & Associates**, a financial management and accounting firm that has been working with florists for more than 30 years. derrick@crockettmyers.com



GO DEEPER

Floral Management has covered shops that experimented with incentive-based pay. Find out more at safnow.org/moreonline.

Industry News

MARYLAND RETAILER TESTIFIES TO CONGRESS

➤ When an influential House committee convened in March to discuss small business issues, a longtime floral industry member was present to share his story — and make the case for the industry at large.

Skip Paal, AAF, of Rutland Beard Floral Group, headquartered in Cantonsville, Maryland, was one of four small-business owners asked to address a special hearing of the House Small Business Committee, “Making Washington Work For America’s Small Businesses.”

Paal, a fourth-generation florist and a member of the Society of American Florists’ board of directors, outlined the challenges his business faces, including the rising cost of health care and the difficulty of uncertain and unclear regulations, including those related to overtime laws and tax reform.

“While the overall economy is certainly in better shape than it was several years ago, it is important to understand that our industry and small businesses all over the nation are still experiencing significant challenges which are preventing entrepreneurs from fully attaining the American Dream,” Paal said, noting that his company’s health care premiums are set to increase by more than 30

percent — a spike that represents a continuation of a years’ long trend under the Affordable Care Act.

Paal, who also participated last week in SAF’s annual Congressional Action Days (see p. 30), also discussed the potentially “devastating” effects of the border adjustment tax.

“Eighty percent of the flowers sold in the United States are imported,” he explained to committee members. “There is no domestic capacity to meet the demand. Flowers are not a necessity like food or housing. If our products are taxed at a higher rate, those costs will translate to higher prices and consumers will shift their spending to other products where flowers have traditionally been appropriate.”

Paal also made a thoughtful plea for committee members to put themselves in industry members’ shoes, particularly when it comes to “lack of clarity in legislation and regulations.”

“It is impossible for small businesses to make decisions and plan when legislation and rules are constantly changing,” he said. “I have discussed the challenges I face with several of my peers in different segments of the floral industry. Every single person told me their greatest

concern was either uncertainty or lack of clarity.”

This isn’t Paal’s first time making his case, and the industry’s, to Congress. In 2015, he testified before the Subcommittee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions of the House Education and Workforce Committee. At the time, he admitted to some nerves beforehand, but said he soon settled into the role.

“The nice part was, there was no wrong answer,” he said. “I just had to talk about what’s going on in my business.” 🌿



MAKING A CASE Skip Paal, AAF, was one of four small business owners asked to share small business challenges with House committee on Capitol Hill in March.

FTD SPRING CAMPAIGN PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON WOMEN

➤ This spring, FTD has been using two female-friendly holidays — International Women’s Day (March 8) and Mother’s Day (May 14) — to bookend an eight-week-long campaign focused on women and flower-giving.



FEMALE FOCUS Visitors to the Philadelphia Flower Show earlier this month were encouraged to take pictures and share them to social media as part of FTD’s #ILookToHer campaign.

FTD kicked off its #ILookToHer campaign March 8 with a giveaway of 5,000 bouquets in Chicago and then continued the effort at the Philadelphia Flower Show, starting on March 11, where the company handed out bouquets at the main exhibition entrance, encouraging recipients to take photos against a floral wall and then share the images on social media with messages about inspiring women and the campaign hash tag.

During the show, FTD Lead Floral Designer Andrea Ancel hosted sessions daily at the show’s “Designer’s Studio.” SAF member Kremp Florist in Philadelphia partnered with FTD to deliver flowers to an “influential and deserving woman in Philadelphia” after most of those sessions.

To complement the campaign, FTD also launched a sweepstakes competition for member florists. To enter, florists need to take a photo of an inspiring woman in their lives, caption it and share it to social media. The prize, for eight winners, is roundtrip flights for two. The deadline to enter is May 3 (FTDi.com/ILookToHer). 🌿

Industry News

MARTHA STEWART HIGHLIGHTS
'AMERICAN GROWN' DINNERS

> One of the country's most famous hosts has given her seal of approval to a series of dinners that celebrate flowers grown in the U.S.

"The American Grown Field to Vase Dinner Tour is setting a new standard for garden parties," according to a recent story posted to Martha Stewart's website. "Each event includes a tour of the flower farm, DIY demonstrations, libations, a locally sourced meal at an impeccably decorated table, good company and flowers to take home. However, the best part of the dinner tour is arguably the setting — when else do you have the opportunity to dine in a field of blooming flowers?"

The Field to Vase series is an effort put together by Certified American Grown, an organization that encourages shoppers to choose domestically grown flowers. Now in its third year, the series kicked off on March 11, at Len Busch Roses in Plymouth, Minnesota, and includes a total of seven events, culminating Nov. 18 at FernTrust in Seville, Florida.

"We're really excited to bring the event to Minnesota," SAF member Patrick Busch, owner of Len Busch Roses, told the reporter at Martha Stewart. "We'll be utilizing our greenhouses that we grow tulips in. We're going to set up a 200-foot table surrounded by about a million tulips." 🌸



FIELD TO VASE

Martha Stewart's website recently highlighted the American Grown Field to Vase Dinner Tour. The seven-series dinner includes stops at a number of SAF member sites, including the kick-off dinner March 11 at Len Busch Roses in Plymouth, Minnesota, and the final dinner Nov. 18 at FernTrust in Seville, Florida.

AFE RECEIVES \$100,000 CONTRIBUTION TO
SUPPORT FLORICULTURE PROGRAMS

100 GRAND Egon and Laina Molbak, shown at their 90th birthday celebration, are supporting AFE's "research efforts, wonderful internship programs, and more" with the establishment of a \$100,000 AFE fund.

> The American Floral Endowment is pleased to announce a \$100,000 contribution from Egon and Laina Molbak to support AFE's floriculture programs. "I am thrilled to continue supporting the American Floral Endowment with this latest contribution," said Egon.

"We give to AFE because they give back to the industry with their important research efforts, wonderful internship programs, and more!"

The generous contribution will establish a new named fund honoring Egon and Laina, and will serve as a lasting tribute of their dedication and support of the floral industry.

The longtime industry veterans, now retired, founded Molbak's Garden + Home outside of Seattle in 1956 after

moving to the U.S. from Denmark. They grew the business from five glass greenhouses with chrysanthemums and carnations to one of the Northwest's premier garden and home destinations.

Molbak's Garden + Home is now owned by the couple's son Jens and attracts more than one million visitors each year. It is known for its relaxing cafe and wide selection of plants and gifts, and is also a host employer for AFE's Vic & Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship Program.

Proud supporters of the Endowment, Egon and Laina are heavily involved in their community and the industry, and have received many local, national and international awards. Egon was also inducted into the Society of American Florist's Floriculture Hall of Fame in 1990.

The Egon and Laina Molbak Fund joins the 21 other AFE named funds that have been created since 2011.

Read more about Egon and Laina's journey at endowment.org/afe-named-funds. 🌸

CONSUMERS GRAB UP FREE
WILDFLOWER SEEDS AS
GENERAL MILLS ADDRESSES
'INVASIVE' CLAIMS

> Customers who pick up a popular type of cereal this spring will notice a key character missing: BuzzBee, the friendly bee familiar to all Honey Nut Cheerio lovers, has been removed from the cereal boxes to help increase awareness of the importance of pollinators.

The Minnesota-based "food company is asking consumers to help 'bring the bees back' by ordering and planting free wildflowers for the pollinators to feast on," according to the Star-Tribune. The company also set up website for people to order wildflower seeds that will be shipped to homes at no cost.

Late in March, however, the website Lifehacker posted a story suggesting the seeds included in the Honey Nut Cheerios packets, including those for forget-me-nots and California poppies, could be invasive and potentially harmful in some environments. The company has pushed back against the Lifehacker post and subsequent consumer concerns.

"In most locations, the seed mixture species will be non-native but not considered invasive," said John Barrett, director of sales, marketing and development with Veseys, the largest mail-order gardening company in Canada, and the company that produced the packets for General Mills. Barrett reported the company has received 700,000 requests for wildflower seed packets on the first day of the U.S. promotion; the General Mills website temporarily crashed during the onslaught and the planned allotment of 2 million packages for the program were grabbed up in just a few days.

Find out how the Society of American Florists and the American Floral Endowment have worked with other industry groups to help promote pollinator health while providing information and research to the industry and consumers at endowment.org/bee. 🌸

BUZZBEE In the first day of its promotion to promote pollinator health in the U.S., General Mills received 700,000 requests for wildflower seed packets.

— Mary Westbrook



BY CRYSTAL VILKAITIS Your Digital Brand

sure my hashtags don't end up on my Facebook post?"

There are two answers to this. One is that you can choose to post your photo without hashtags, then add the hashtags in a comment on Instagram afterward. The hashtags included in your comment will still make the image searchable. The other option is to post the photo with hashtags to Facebook, and then go in and remove them manually. Both methods work equally well.

Hit the Links

Linking is quite simple to do on Facebook and Pinterest, and only slightly more complicated on Instagram and Twitter.

When you paste or type a link into Facebook, it should automatically pull up a thumbnail and the meta description of the page or article you are sharing. You can then remove the text link, as it makes your post longer than it needs to be. If, for some reason, you do not want to see the thumbnail photo and description (perhaps you want to upload your own photo, or you want a text-only post), you can click the X in the top right corner to remove it, and leave only the text link.

When you pin something using the "Pin It" button, or add a pin from a URL, your pin will already be linked to the page you'd like it to be on. If you're adding a pin from a photo, you will need to add the URL manually.

For both Twitter and Instagram, it's best to include the text link in each of your posts. A workaround of this on Instagram is to update your profile URL to whatever link you are featuring, and instead of repeating the link in your post, simply say, "Link in bio." (See below.)

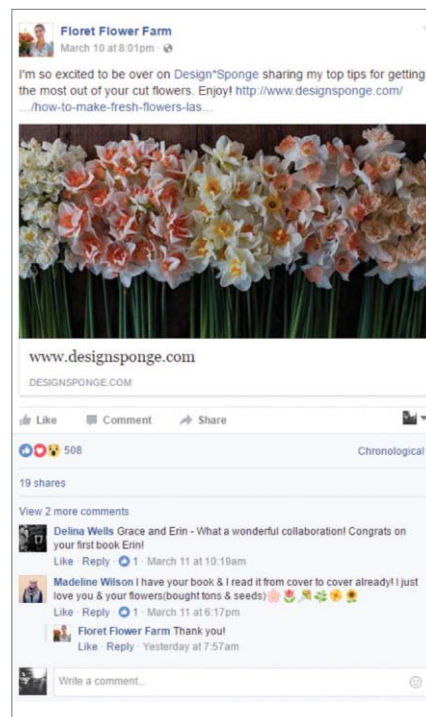


The Tags

Tagging is the ultimate way to friend fellow business owners on Facebook. Tagging is simple. When you're ready to mention a business in your post, type the @ symbol and start typing the name of their page. Click on the correct one, and it will be included as hyperlinked text in your post, meaning that when users click on it, it will take them to that business's page. Tagging may not be available if a business has it turned off in its privacy settings. In this case, just mentioning the business, or making the business name a hashtag on Instagram, will do.

Below, Floret Flower Farm in Washington tagged Design*Sponge, a popular design website, to thank them for allowing the owner to contribute an article.

When they tag the page, it is shown not only to their followers, but also to the followers of the page they tagged, increasing the reach of the article. (Note that in the example, the admin could have removed the text link in the caption to make it shorter, as once the thumbnail pops up featuring the article photo, it is linked to the article.)



Remember that if you're looking to tag people on your business page, you will be able to tag them only if you are friends with them on the personal profile tied to your business page.

One time that it's a bad idea to tag is when you're talking about a brand that you carry in-store. If, for instance, you carry Pandora bracelets in the gift section of your store, tagging their page makes it easy for customers to click over to that page and buy from them directly. Instead, just mention brand names or include them as hashtags on Instagram.

Embrace Emojis



Using emojis is a great way to express emotions and add something special to your posts, without taking up too much space. Emojis work great on all social media platforms, as well as in email body copy and subject lines.

I love the example above, from The Farmer's Daughter in Pittsburgh because it:

- Uses hashtags to catch your eye.
- Uses a high-quality photo.
- Has short and entertaining text.
- Gives followers a specific CTA. 🌻

Crystal Vilkaitis is a social media teacher, owner of Crystal Media heycrystalmedia.com, and founder of Social Edge, a membership website for retailers on social media trends and changes, socialedge.co.

Business of Design

SPRING SENSATIONS

➤ “Bulbs, please!” — that request dominates early spring orders at Helen Olivia Flowers in Alexandria, Virginia. “After months of darkness and cold weather, our clients are eager for a new season,” said owner Rachel Gang. And nothing signals warmth and rebirth like a big bunch of daffodils, irises, hyacinth or tulips.

When making a design with these natural mood boosters, Gang groups flowers in like bunches. “Bulb flowers continue to grow after they’re cut, and if you spread them out, the arrangement can begin to

look chaotic and sloppy — like you have these floral tentacles going every which way,” she explained. Her technique alleviates the growing pains and “keeps everything looking purposeful, beautiful and chic” for several days.

Here, she shares two designs that deliver smiles to customers’ faces — and pretty profits for the shop. 🌸

Find complete recipes at safnow.org/moreonline.

Katie Hendrick khendrick@safnow.org



CHARTREUSE CHARMER

Low and lush, this design — one of the shop’s best sellers — encapsulates a garden’s splendor yet still fits nicely on a coffee table, dining table or reception desk. Design time: 30 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$43. Suggested retail price: \$175.



PINK PIZAZZ

Rolled aspidistra leaves frame a hand-tied bouquet of tulips, making the fuchsia petals pop. “We love this design because it’s simple and elegant, which really resonates with our clientele,” Gang said. Design time: 20 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$39. Suggested retail price: \$130.



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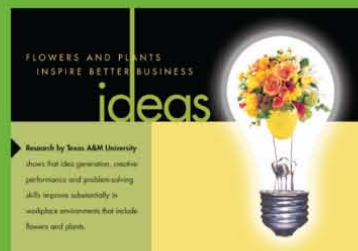
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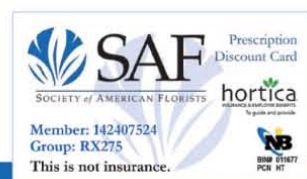


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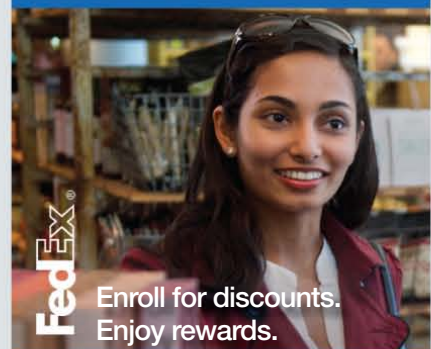
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— Anthony Munoz, Village Greenery & Flowers
Houston, Texas



"We took our entire staff. Why? It is important that everyone is on the same page, and everyone is impacted by different presentations."

— Marsha Jones, Littleton's Woodlawn Floral Inc.
Littleton, Colorado



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Quality

 BY TERRIL A. NELL, PH.D., AAF

TOTAL FLOWER CARE, SIMPLIFIED

> Thirty-eight years ago, Philip Crosby wrote “Quality Is Free.” In that book, he described quality management techniques for the automobile and electronics industries, demonstrating that shrink can be reduced significantly, and products guaranteed to work properly, simply by ensuring that they are assembled correctly. Quality and profitability are lost when employees fail to use the right part or install parts incorrectly, he argued. “We must define quality as ‘conformance to requirements’ if we are to manage it,” he wrote.

When you think about it, the same principles apply to floriculture. Indeed, a total quality management framework would place responsibility for proper care and handling on each individual who touches a flower, from harvest to sale. Managers monitor the process and ensure that each step in the handling process is correctly implemented every time.

How do you implement that level of oversight, professionalism and quality at your shop? Fifteen years ago, the American Floral Endowment developed basic protocols, the “Three C’s” that shops of every size can put into practice right away.

Cooling, Cleanliness, Care

AFE’s Three C’s are cleanliness, cooling and care. Flower quality and vase life depend on these three factors. Let’s take a closer look at each variable.

Cooling. Cold temperatures conserve the stored sugars that are essential for flower opening and extended vase life. Increased temperatures deplete these stored sugars rapidly. Also, flowers are more sensitive to ethylene at warmer temperatures. The optimum storage and shipping temperature for nontropical flowers is 34 F to 36 F. Every degree above these temperatures decreases vase life. The vase life of ‘Valentine’ rose decreased from 14 days to five days when stored at 49 F compared to 35 F. Tropical flowers, on the other hand, should be stored at temperatures of 50 F to 55 F to avoid chilling injury.

Cleanliness. Cut flowers must absorb water and sugar for optimum vase life. Dirty buckets and reused solutions

contain microbes that are absorbed into the stem, blocking the uptake of water and causing flowers to die prematurely due to water stress. Buckets should be scrubbed with commercial flower bucket cleaners to thoroughly sanitize the buckets. Design tables, clippers, and cooler benches and walls should also be cleaned on a regular basis to prevent fungal spore contamination.

Care. Commercial hydration solutions and flower foods lower solution pH, minimize microbial growth and promote water absorption. Each of these functions accelerates water uptake and improves hydration for the flowers. Mix according to label instructions to get the best results. Using flower foods increases flower opening and extends vase life. Treating ethylene-sensitive flowers with anti-ethylene products is also critical. These products prevent internal ethylene production and provide resistance to external ethylene gas. Failure to pretreat ethylene-sensitive flowers will result in reduced flower life; petal, leaf and bud drop; and failure of flowers to open.

Total Care

Of course, care and handling don’t happen in a vacuum. Maintaining flowers at cold temperatures, in clean conditions

and with proper solutions will keep flowers healthy. But the value of cooling can be lost if flowers are placed into dirty buckets without properly mixed flower food. All of your efforts can be wasted if cooler shelves and walls are dirty and harbor disease spores that can infect and damage fresh flowers.

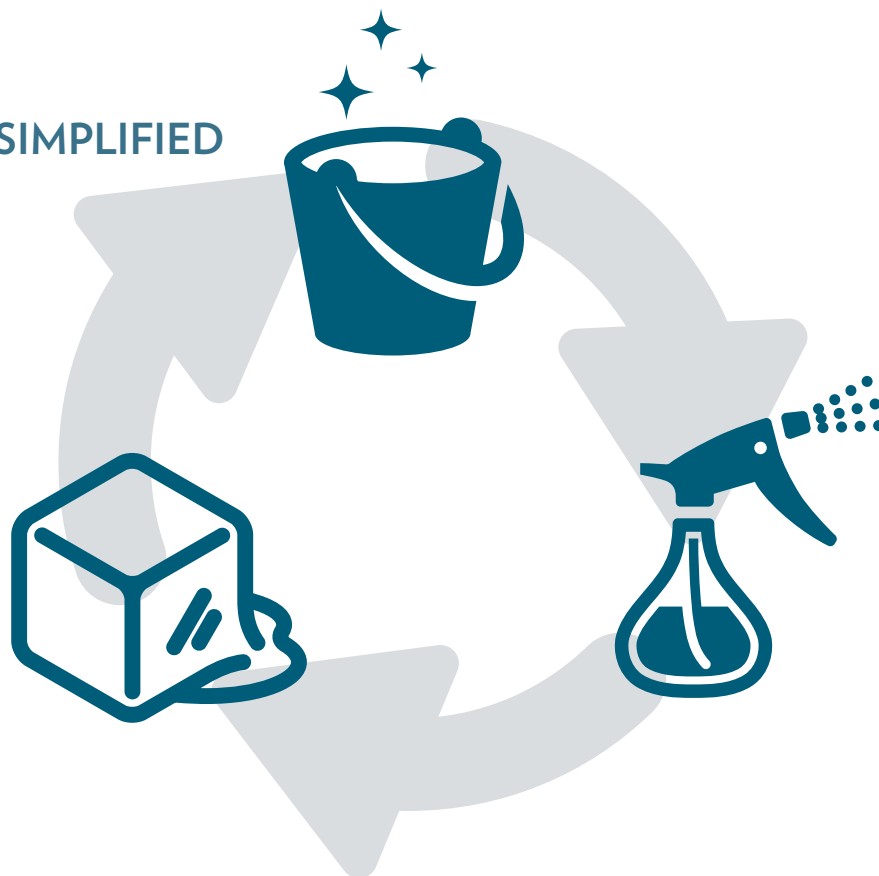
Still, imagine what would happen if every cut flower lasted seven days or more! It is possible. “Quality is free” should become a new marketing strategy for the floral industry. It’s so simple: Care for every flower properly, each and every time. Give your customers long-lasting flowers, and those happy customers will return. 🌿

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GO DEEPER

Floral Management published a care and handling checklist for retail florists in its February issue. Get that list today at safnow.org/moreonline.



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