

An Outsider Steps In

Bringing a nonfamily senior-level team member into a family business can be a challenge — one that requires flexibility and communication on both sides. In Sam Bowles, the Levy family found their ideal candidate, in part because his experience in the industry was deep.

As a grad student in Louisville, Kentucky, Sam picked up seasonal hours at Nanz & Kraft, a venerable florist with three locations, before moving up the ranks to help supervise the organization's call center. After that, he managed another florist in New York. From there, Sam was hired by Tim Huckabee, a customer service expert, Floral Management columnist, founder of Floral Strategies LLC, and a longtime friend.

For the next several years, Sam traveled the world with Huckabee, conducting training in hundreds of shops in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom in best practices in service. In 2012, one of those training sessions brought Sam to San Diego, where he worked with the staff at Allen's. Four years later, in 2016, Sam was teaching high school — a brief return to the career path he'd long envisioned for himself before he ever set foot in a flower shop — when Huckabee invited him to return to Allen's during spring break for some follow-up training. Sam jumped at the chance to get back into the floral industry for what seemed like a brief assignment. He missed the entrepreneurial hum of a small business.

That's when the professional sparks flew. That fateful second trip to Allen's may have started as a routine training session, but it soon evolved into something more long-lasting: a strong partnership with the Levys.

"When you've been working with your family for 20 years, bringing in an outsider is a challenge," Brad Levy said. "In Sam, we found someone who fit with our family and our employees—some of whom have been with us for 30 years."

For his part, Sam, who still works part-time for Floral Strategies, called the experience "a unique ride for all of us."

"Owners are very protective about their businesses, as they should be," he said. "It has been a learning curve, but Max, Marilyn and Brad have put their trust in me — and I've put my trust in them."