

GET YOUR STAFF ON BOARD THE QUALITY TRAIN

> They'll be here before we know it: the fall and winter holidays, one of the busiest times of the year. When you're extra busy, that might be just the time when your staff is tempted to take shortcuts in the care and handling of fresh flowers. It's also the time of year when you may take on temporary employees who are not well trained in quality procedures, nor aware of their importance.

But when you're busy is exactly when it's most important to make sure your care and handling is optimum, said flower expert, television host and Chrystal creative consultant J Schwanke, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, "because that's when you're reaching the most customers, so you want to make sure that all of their experiences are the best they can be. That's how you get return customers!"

The Eyes Have It

Bent neck, botrytis mold, yellowing leaves, petals that wilt and drop sooner than they should: The true consequences of poor care and handling often aren't seen until after your flowers have left the shop. That's one reason why it's easy to underestimate the impact of following

the right procedures — or of failing to do so. But how do you drive that home?

Conduct your own in-shop demonstrations, suggests Vonda LaFever, AIFD, PFCI, vice president at the consulting practice TeamFloral and a Teleflora education specialist. It can be very simple: Cut six roses and place three of them in plain water. Process the other three following all the right steps, including the use of properly mixed flower nutrient.

"A week later," said LaFever, "those roses tell everyone, 'No wonder we take the extra time and effort to do that. Look at what a difference it makes!'"

You can take this idea as far as you want. For example, compare the effects of holding solution versus vase solution (the first intended for storing flowers, the second for encouraging those flowers to open, color up, and produce fragrance).

Side by Side

Employees may think of care and handling tasks as boring or menial. That's why it's important for shop owners to work alongside employees while training, checking up, and periodically re-training them, said LaFever: "When you start out

TEACHING AIDS

Maybe the most important step in training is to give staff the tools for review and for continuing education. Resources abound — but be sure to point employees to the right ones, since bad as well as good advice can be found on the internet. Find out more at safnow.org/moreonline.

working side by side with them, it shows respect for the task and what a difference it makes."

Without getting too technical, it's helpful to share a little of the science behind flower processing protocol. Explain the why as well as what to do.

Depending on the size of your staff, you may need a point person — a designated care and handling expert — who may or may not be the lead designer.

Different Flowers, Different Strokes

Yes, there are basics that apply in just about every situation. But when you aim to follow the very best practices, for the very best results, you quickly get into slightly different solutions for different flowers. You may want your employees, for example, always to use hydration solution with roses and hydrangeas, never with soft-stem flowers like tulips. Or you may want them to use an antibacterial agent for flowers with fine hairs on the stems, like gerberas, that are prone to bacterial growth.

You can't teach it all at once, but you can start with the basics and let employees know that there is always more to learn about making flowers last longer. Continually refining that knowledge should be a point of professional pride. One opportunity is to introduce care tips for specialty flowers as they come into season: dahlias and zinnias in summer, berried branches in the fall, Christmas greens when the holidays are here. 🌿

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TRAINING TIME Fall offers an ideal time to refresh staff on important skills and steps in care and handling.