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# The 'offseason'

Sometimes I feel that people outside the nursery industry think we only really work during our harvest season, which for most of us is in the spring.

The prevailing thought among my non-industry friends seems to be that after we ship the present crop and plant next season's crop, we simply kick back and wait. They're under the impression that life between harvests is just a giant, lazy offseason.

Now, I am sure that somewhere, someone has arranged their schedule like that. Good for them. For the rest of us, there's a lot to do in the summertime. We may celebrate (hopefully), but we also work on our weaknesses, prepare for next season, and of course do the stuff we put off during shipping season (or is that just me?).

To offer a comparison, I enjoy running as a hobby. It is a very challenging sport. Often it is not difficult for me to draw parallels between my long-distance running and operating a business — especially a grower operation in Oregon.

Typically, a hobby runner has key races planned that create a loosely defined season. For instance, I have the California International Marathon in the beginning of December, and I always set an ambitious goal. Marathons aren't easy. I usually sign up for shorter races as part of the buildup to that cool (please), dry (please), and windless (please) morning in Sacramento.

That's my "season." A competitive or professional level runner — which I am not! — may actually have a defined season. Either way, the runner can look out at some period of time and know they have to be "ready to roll" by such and such date.

As growers, likewise, we see early spring on the horizon and we know we better have our ducks in a row. The plan to prepare for the harvest may look simple. It might even be spelled out as a 12–18 week program. But do we sit around the rest of the time and twiddle our thumbs? No. Most nurseries around Oregon are just like great athletes. We know that, as they say, "the separation is in the preparation." What we do between seasons makes us better.

As I mentioned, we celebrate in the "offseason." We finish a big shipping season and maybe we do kick back with a family vacation or remodel (ugh) to remind us why we work so hard in this uniquely challenging industry, dealing with all the stresses of business plus whatever Mother Nature has in store.

Likewise, after a big race season I go into a similar mode of just running relaxed in preferably new and beautiful places. These adventures simplify things and serve as a good reminder to me of why I really do like running.

The "offseason" is a good time to address weaknesses. During my present running offseason I am trying to focus on form and strengthening certain muscles that will help me avoid injury on the next big training cycle. Likewise, even after a relatively smooth harvest and ship, we can typically look back and say we should have tweaked this a little or utilized this more.

By identifying weaknesses that need help, we can improve our communications, software, dock layout, label room, checkout stands or many other things. It's the same as a runner doing lunges or squats to improve running form.

Our offseasons aren't empty. We conduct inventory, create catalogs, gather pre-orders, place pre-orders, educate customers on new products, generate marketing materials and market ourselves at shows (like Farwest!).

All this stuff (somewhat sadly) keeps us inside on some beautiful days — much nicer ones than when we tromped through the rain during the spring — but all of it has to be done.

So lace up your trainers or put on your boots, and stay after it. It pays off at the finish line — whatever your finish line may be. ☺



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