

Success is the sum of many parts

The nursery and greenhouse industry is chock full of successful operations — companies that have grown with the industry over time.

To achieve that kind of lasting success requires a strong vision, as well as an ability to build a sound team to execute it.

I've been fortunate to participate in successful teams multiple times during my career. While working for a U.S. senator, I was forged by the brass-knuckled atmosphere of politics. Then, I served as chief of staff for the Metro regional government while it was undergoing an all-encompassing structural change. For the last decade, I have served as your OAN executive director — long enough to endure hard times and appreciate the prosperity that followed.

Every day, OAN members demonstrate how strong companies and organizations are more than the sums of their parts. Everyone contributes, from the office personnel, to the talented and skilled workforce in the field (or the greenhouse, or the store), to the ownership families who place a value on the craftsmanship of high-quality green goods.

I like to believe that our industry is modest, never boasting about success. That is a quality I hold dear. Your nursery association is run in a similar, businesslike fashion. The OAN is dedicated to supporting all facets of your business and every member business. We carefully invest the dues you contribute, and the volunteer hours many members provide, in programs that are built to help your business.

I want you to know your OAN staff is talented, professional and committed. I don't hesitate to declare that this staff does more for its membership than any other in this industry, in United States and Canada. As we built this team, we made sure it matched the work ethic of our members. We want to work as hard as you do.

Building a team

Start a conversation about team building, and you're likely to hear sports metaphors in short order. Not everyone is a big sports fan, but we all know a care-

fully built team with clearly identified roles is more likely to lead to success.

The members of the association are the owners of the OAN, and the OAN Board of Directors is their representative. Our board is like an elite coaching staff. Through engaged and active thinking, the board helps us create strategies and a playbook to put association members in the best possible position to be effective.

The 10-person OAN staff is made up of seasoned professionals. They take direction from the board, working diligently to execute the game plan. As your executive director, I have a team that is collaborative, supportive, and knows what to do to make sure we stay on task.

Making a commitment

Those outside of agriculture have little understanding about the level of commitment that it takes to make an agricultural operation successful. This element can build team chemistry if present, while a lack of commitment can hollow out an organization.

Success is most likely when team members believe in — and commit to — the mission and purpose of your business. This commitment is realized when a team member can set aside his or her personal ownership of a job description to benefit the team.

Establishing effective communication tools is perhaps the most difficult aspect of team building. It takes trust and openness. Strong teams need the ability to share thoughts and feelings without the fear of reprisal.

At the OAN, I have tried to build a culture that any idea is valued and listened to, no matter who raised it or where they fit on the organizational chart. These discussions may not lead to that idea being implemented in its initial form, but often, they can lead to a solution. They can open a different door that would have been closed before.

I am not big on perfunctory staff meetings where team members report what they are working on, but I do follow two practices.

First, catch people doing things right. An annual review should never include surprises about the successes or challenges



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that occurred over the past year.

Second, bad news does not get better with time. When a mistake is made or a project goes sideways, it's essential to have an open door to solve it right away.

We can learn from each other

No matter how successful an operation may be, it is important to learn from others. Knowing what you don't know is key — it prompts you to look to teammates and outside resources when you sense a need or just want a reality check.

I am fortunate to be deeply involved with the Nursery and Landscape Association Executives, an organization that includes nursery executives from the United States and the Canadian provinces.

The talent of my colleagues is astounding. I can learn from seasoned leaders from Arizona, Idaho and Massachusetts who have served the industry for two-plus decades. This provides exposure to innovative ideas that serve the industry. It is a personal privilege to act as a mentor to new executive directors — one that I value.

The OAN does a lot of things right. Our association is structured to be member-driven. We are nimble on emerging issues and we serve as a fierce ally to our valued members.

Make no mistake about it: joining an association is not mandatory. However, every OAN member should rest easy knowing that you have an engaged, responsive board and an association that is committed to the success of the industry. ☺