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Planning for Profitable Operations

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There is too much risk involved in any business operation to allow you as a manager to operate without planning. Many American businesses are planning up to 20 years in the future, however, most businesses have at least a plan for the next year of operation. There are many reasons for planning, but the most important are:

1. The ability to predict the time of receipt of revenues from sales; this is especially important where seasonal sales and credit agreements are involved.
2. The ability to plan for expenditures, especially accounts payable—where short term needs for cash are involved.

Is it possible to plan in a bedding plant operation? Yes! Because you have a limited selling season, you have a predictable production time for each crop, and you have a limited period to order seeds and supplies.

You may now ask, how do I plan. Most bedding plant growers have been planning off the top of their heads for years. Well, now is the time to extend your planning with the aid of pencil and paper.

What should I know to plan successfully? The following list should help:

1. Your past sales records by variety.
2. Requests by your customers for certain varieties, especially new ones.
3. New varieties which are more appealing to the market, and easier for you and the homemaker to grow.
4. A feeling of what your competitors will grow. This does not have to be exact. You could feel that no one will be likely to grow certain varieties, so you can fill the gap. Or you could gear most production to new varieties and be ahead of competition.
5. A feeling of what the market wants both in terms of varieties and containers. This again does not have to be exact. Just remember that 75% of inexperienced purchasers buy plants in bloom.
6. Finally, you will want to have a profit goal. You can set this as an increase over last year's profit, or as a return on investment basis after you have excluded expenses and your salary. From this you should be able to estimate the total quantity of plants to produce.

Now, take what you know, what you feel and what you need and start planning.

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Is Your Business Growing?

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Every successful business must grow! There is often mental resistance to this philosophy, but it is inevitable. To attempt to remain static is to fall backward. There are too many factors beyond the control of the farm operator to allow him to reach a position and hold it without growth. Growth involves a variety of things about the farm business. It can involve *numbers*, it almost certainly involves *dollar volume of sales*, and should include growth in the *capabilities* of the personnel and the *physical plant* for effective production.

Much of the mental resistance to the inevitability of growth results from our interpretation of growth as meaning expansion in numbers, which the other fellow is forever doing to our disadvantage. Growth does often require expansion in numbers or size, but unless it is accompanied by growth in the other factors mentioned, it

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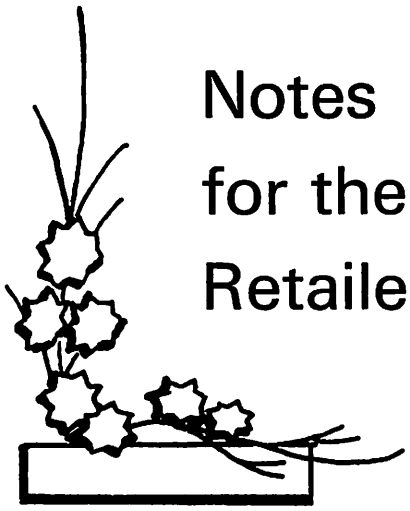

Notes for the Retailer

Telephone Selling[1]

PAUL R. KRONE

Since a large percent of sales in most flower shops comes in over the telephone, your employees should get special training for handling these calls. Telephone selling is harder than selling on the floor because you have to build word pictures that will enable the customer to visualize what you are describing. It requires a thorough knowledge of the merchandise and of the types of arrangements that are suitable for each occasion. Here are some suggestions on telephone selling.

Suggestions for You

★ Have enough extensions so that incoming calls can be answered promptly and without unnecessary steps for your salespeople.

★ Have the telephone company check to make sure that you have enough incoming lines. Customers trying to reach you should not get too many busy signals.

★ Keep pencils, order forms, and scratch pads handy to each phone.

★ Also keep at each phone a list of the flowers you have available, along with recommended suggestions and prices.

★ If possible, have the phones located so that the person answering the call can see the refrigerator or display area. This will help the salespeople to remember just what is available and to give word descriptions of items you would like to sell.

★ Have the phones in a quiet place, or use booths that reduce interference both in receiving and transmitting. If you have an employee with hearing difficulties, ask the telephone company to install phones on which the receiving volume can be adjusted.

★ Work out a series of abbreviations to help in writing up orders quickly. But be sure that they are standard throughout the shop and that everyone understands them. A typical example is *"BWSR"* for *"Best wishes for a speedy recovery."*

Suggestions for Your Salespeople

★ Answer the phone promptly and courteously. Use the firm name and your own in answering so that customers will know with whom they are speaking. Keep a smile in your voice. A pleasant "Good afternoon" or "Good morning" eases the start of the conversation.

★ Don't answer the phone chewing gum or with a cigarette or cigar or food in your mouth.

★ Keep your voice pleasant. Moderate it to show sincere friendliness and helpfulness.

★ Get the customer's name as early in the conversation as possible. Write it on a scratch pad unless he has already stated definitely that he wants to place an order. If he has, write the name directly on the order pad. If you write the name down, you are less likely to forget it and have to ask the customer to repeat it later in the conversation.

★ Use the customer's name when you are speaking. Try to visualize the person you are talking to and keep the conversation on a person-to-person basis. Avoid being mechanical or impersonal.

★ Get all the facts. How are the flowers to be used? When will they be needed? Does the customer prefer certain kinds of flowers or colors or types of arrangements? Make some helpful suggestions.

★ Make the sale definite, and be sure to record all the details—what is to go into each order, to whom it goes, the price, to whom it is to be charged, the date and time of the delivery, and the information or message to go on the card to be enclosed.

★ Be sure that all information and spelling are correct. The letters B, C, D, E, and G all sound much alike, as does S and F. You can make sure that you have the correct spelling by using a word starting with the letter in question—for example, "B as in Boston."

Also, be very careful about figures—60 and 16, for instance, sound very much alike. Be sure to identify them before you record them.

★ Use telephone selling to move items you want to move, but never attempt to force something on the customer he doesn't want. If you try to oversell, it's easy for him to hang up and call someone else.

On the other hand, don't undersell, as suggested before. Make the merchandise sound so attractive that the customer will buy the recommended item at a price that satisfies both the store and the customer.

★ Be a good listener, but direct the conversation as much as possible.

★ Let the customer hang up first.

[1]An excerpt from: *Starting and Managing a Retail Flower Shop*, by Paul R. Krone. The Starting and Managing Series, Volume 18, Small Business Administration, Washington, D.C. 1970.

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Toward Longer-Lasting Flowers . . .

Why Do Plants Wilt?

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Cut flowers and potted plants are comprised of 80-85% water. To appear fresh and crisp, this percentage of moisture must be maintained within the plant tissue. Some fruit and vegetable crops may have a water content as high as 90-96%. The problem of water loss is crucial if long vase life of cut flowers and potted plants is to be achieved. It has been said. *'Life in the cut flower hangs on a slender "thread" of water, since a moisture loss of 10% of the original weight of the cut flower means the flower is "dead" for all practical purposes.'*

Loss of water: All living plants give off water vapor from their internal tissues. This process is called transpiration and occurs mostly through the leaves. Since transpiration takes place from living tissues, it is influenced by the structure and physiology of the plant. Important external factors influencing transpiration are sunlight, temperature, humidity and air movement. Most of the transpiration occurs through the stomata. When the stomata are open, water is lost through them. If the loss of water by transpiration exceeds the rate of water absorption, wilting results.

Factors affecting transpiration: Light causes the stomata to open and results in an increased rate of transpiration. Ordinarily, the rate of transpiration increases from morning to noon, then is at a maximum for about an hour or so, subsequently decreases, and becomes lowest at night. When the humidity of the air is high, as on damp, foggy days, little transpiration occurs. Likewise, there is little wilting under such conditions. Shading is often an effective way of delaying or preventing wilting.

Leaf temperature in excess of air temperature promotes increased transpiration. The increased transpiration at higher temperatures results from the relatively greater vapor pressure inside the leaf due to the leaf temperature.

Air movement may hasten transpiration by removing the accumulated moisture just outside the leaf. By lowering the relative humidity next to the leaf, a comparatively steep gradient is set up between the vapor pressure inside and outside. For example, a tremendous gradient is present when cut flowers or potted plants are placed in homes because most homes have relatively dry atmospheres, or, in other words, low relative humidity conditions. This is why flowers and plants require large quantities of water especially in homes.

Why Do Flowers Die?[1]

There are several fundamental causes for the deterioration and death of fresh cut flowers, and anything that florists do to prolong their vase life will be related to one or more of these factors. According to Post and Fischer, the basic causes for the deterioration of flowers are:

The exhaustion of respirable substrates. A flower loses food through normal respiration after harvest, since it is still a living, metabolizing entity. After being cut from the plant, it is no longer able to effectively synthesize food materials, and it dies when its supply of food materials is exhausted. Respirable substrates consist of (a) those substances present in the flower at the time of harvest and (b) those respirable substances which may be supplied after harvest in the form of floral preservatives.

Desiccation, or drying out. Maintenance of turgidity of cut flowers is sometimes a difficult problem, and many of the practices suggested to prolong their life attempt to regulate this factor.

Maturation and continued development of the flowers. After flowers such as roses, gladioli and snapdragons have fully opened, they are no longer salable, because their further useful life is extremely short. Even though other flowers such as chrysanthemums, carnations, etc., may not show any too-apparent signs of maturation, such processes are actually taking place and development is occurring.

Ravages of disease. Flowers may rot or mold either while in shipment or in storage. Many fungi are responsible for such attacks, with species of *Botrytis* being particularly prominent. Control of these problems lies primarily with the producer.

Ethylene injury. Ethylene gas hastens the processes of maturation and respiration. It may come in contact with fresh cut flowers from several sources. It is produced in abundance by many kinds of fruits and vegetables, certainly florists' greens and many cut flowers themselves, particularly if they have diseased flowers or foliage. It may also come from gas leaks, exhaust fumes or other industrial sources.

Fading of flower color or color changes. Every florist has seen the color changes occurring in flowers such as snapdragons which have opened florets while in the refrigerator before sale. Once these faded colors are prominent, the further useful life of such a flower is limited. In certain cases, also, flowers such as Better Times roses may show objectionable bluing of their color, and thereafter their usefulness is quite limited.

[1] Taken from *Commercial Storage of Cut Flowers* by K. Post and C. W. Fischer, Jr., Cornell Extension Bulletin 853, 1952.

Investment in Retail Shop Improvements

During the five-year period 1955-1960 improvements were made in some aspect of retailing in two out of every three retail florist shops. The improvement may have been merely replacing a cooler. More commonly, though, the improvement included a partial or a complete store renovation.

Although nine out of ten of these florists who experienced a substantial growth in sales had also made investments to improve their shops, such investments were not necessarily business builders for all florists. The survey showed that half of the florists who made shop investments did not have a substantial increase in sales. Thus, improving shop appearance was in most cases a requisite, but not necessarily a sufficient, step for growth.

Excerpts from: *Marketing Floricultural Crops in the Northeast, Part III: Retail Florists*, by A. W. Dewey. Univ. of Conn. Agr. Exp. Sta. Bulletin 379. May 1963.

Guidelines for the Safe Disposal of Surplus Pesticides and Empty Containers

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Editors Note: This is the final part of this paper. The first part appeared in the March Bulletin.

IV. *Disposal Pit for Surplus Pesticides and Containers*

Location

Remote area not likely to be dug up.

Dry, low water table. Poorly drained clay soils preferred to sandy soils to minimize leaching. Commercial users must have area approved by local representatives responsible for solid waste disposal.

Dimensions

If feasible, large enough to receive pesticides and containers in a single layer. At least 18 inches of dirt should cover the disposed material. Commercial users may find it necessary to make burial pit deeper and pesticide layer thicker.

Thin layers promote microbial action.

There is less chance of ground water contamination if disposal pit is not deep.

Procedure

Put on necessary protective gear (see labels).

Obtain quantity of hydrated (slaked) lime equal in volume to waste pesticides. Line bottom of pit with half the amount of lime. Calcium hypochlorite, in small quantities, is also helpful in degrading many pesticides.

Put pesticides and containers in pit.

Empty glass containers and break them, taking care not to splash pesticide.

Breaking containers insures that they will not be reused and no increment of pesticide concentrate will be left if pit is dug up at a later date.

Leave dry materials in boxes or bags. Bury intact.

Lessens hazards of exposure of individual to toxic dusts.

Lessens chance of pesticide concentrates escaping into the air and drifting to surrounding areas.

Place punctured and crushed metal containers in pit but do not puncture or crush pressurized cans (aerosals, bug bombs); rather, hold the valve open until pressure is exhausted.

Spread remainder of lime over surplus, then immediately fill in hole with dirt. Pack tightly and mound up so that rainwater will run off to the side of the pit rather than puddling and leaching pesticides down from the pit.

Homeowners and small users should map bury pits so that they will not be inadvertently dug up later. Commercial users should post and fence disposal area in addition to mapping.

V. *Some Cooperage Firms That Recondition or Salvage Pesticide Drums*

Active Steel Drum Company, 52-30 34th Street, Long Island City, New York, 11101. Phone (212) 786-9300). Contact company. Delivery to Long Island City necessary.

Bayonne Barrel and Drum Company, Raymond Boulevard and Route 1, Newark, New Jersey 07105. Phone (201) 622-0110. Contact company. Dealers located in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New England areas.

D. F. Farrel Sons, Inc., 592 Arnold Road, P.O. #286, Coventry, Rhode Island. Phones (401) VA 8-0515 and (401) VA 8-5040. Contact company.

H. Hyman Drum and Barrel, 878 South Division Street, Buffalo, New York. Phone (716) 825-2398. Contact company.

Kernis Drum Corp., 70 Blanchard Street, Newark, New Jersey 07105. Phones (201) MA 2-1181 and (201) MA-12183. Contact company for pick up for delivery to reconditioners within 50 mile area.

Kingsland Drum and Barrel Company, Inc., 308 Miller Street, Newark, New Jersey 07114. Phones (201) 243-1710 and (212) BA 7-2565. Contact company.

National Steel Drum Co., Inc., Trenton Avenue & Ontario Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19134. Phones (215) CU-8-2322 and (215) PI 3-5056. Contact company for pick up points.

VI. *Article 11-A of Agriculture and Markets Law—Custom Application of Pesticides. Part 154.*

154.5 *Disposal of Pesticide Containers and Unused Pesticides.*

(a) No pesticide containers shall be disposed of in any place other than at a refuse site, a sanitary land fill, or in an incinerator, all of which shall have been approved for the purpose. Reusable containers may be disposed of for uses not prohibited in 154.6 below, providing such containers are treated as outlined.

(b) Containers of pesticides shall be treated in the following manner before disposal:

(1) *Disposal of Noncombustible Containers*

(i) Rinse at least twice with water or the pesticide carrier being used. Return rinses to the spray tank.

(ii) Transport the cleaned container to the approved disposal site—See Section 154.5-a.

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