

Kiss My Aster

3/1/2024

The Parasocial Paradox

Amanda Thomsen



Amanda Thomsen

I struggle with this thing and it's a thing I've preached YOU do and it's a REAL thing and it WORKS, but ugh.

Someone has to be the face of your business—is it you? I'd recommend having a few faces (for reasons to be illuminated below), but customers like getting to know us and also the stinking algorithm likes faces/humans in photos so it clearly makes sense. I struggle with this because sometimes I don't want to get the tripod out and talk to myself and I'd rather throw myself in the canal than ask Tyler to be the cameraman. Sometimes I'm too bogged down to be effervescent; there's just so much sitting at my desk. But also? I've been a "personality" in this industry for a long time now and I realize that parasocial relationships are something very hard for me

to hurdle over.

What's a parasocial relationship? Well, for a long time it was when you liked a movie star so you bought magazines to learn about that person and maybe made a scrapbook about them and you knew everything about their lives. Nowadays, this is something that even goes for TikTok and YouTube creators and even humble bloggers. It is WEIRD to meet people that know A LOT about you, and if you're the face of your company, you may have felt any of these things: people wanting you specifically to help them, people being really nervous around you (possibly some real loud nervous laughter), getting the feeling that people dressed up to meet you, wanting photos with you and/or wanting to friend you on personal social media accounts.

For me personally, I've gone through so much of this as Kiss My Aster that I'm wary of doing it as Aster Gardens. I've been raffled off as someone you can sit next to at lunch and bizarrely had people line up to get photos with me after getting off stage after keynoting IGC a few years back. It's very odd to go from the adulation of people you're just like to, for example, your tween thinking you're a complete idiot.

For me, I'm really an introvert with a very narrow window of circumstances for when this is all comfortable. My shop is my little haven and I'm weird about inviting this weirdness when people look me in the eyes and say, "I just love everything you say on social media. It's so funny and true and ... you're so authentic." I'm thankful that Tyler will interrupt and say, "Yeah, she's also an idiot" to take some of the pressure off.

And now people have parasocial relationships with Tyler, which is obviously of my own doing. I wanted to hype him up because:

A. He's a teen and it's not obvious to anyone that he's a plant genius and I need to be able to leave him in charge

sometimes, even though it's terrifying.

B. He dresses like a very suspicious person and there's just no stopping it. Might as well shine a light on it.

When I speak with him about it, he suggests I adopt a "tagline" to deal with it. Like when someone asked to either "marry or adopt him" the other night, yes, he thought it was absolutely bizarre, but he was also able to laugh it off by stretching his arms out wide, pointing to himself and shouting, "YES I AM AWESOME!", something I have judged an 18-year-old can pull off better than I can. When it happens to me, I have to go sit in my dark office and dissociate for a bit.

Being the face of my business is everything I've ever wanted, but the awkwardness is something I can't seem to get used to. One of my goals for this year is to listen to my own advice and get out in front much more often, but I need advice on how to pretend to be famous when I am absolutely just a person with a geeky passion for plants and more hustle than good sense. I don't think my ego can handle these peaks and valleys. Any advice for me? **GP**

Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author now with her own store, Aster Gardens in Lemont, Illinois. Her blog is planted at KissMyAster.com and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.