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Columns

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Being Productive

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Lloyd Traven said something during his keynote speech at IGC East this year that I can't stop thinking about. He was telling a story about an interaction he had with a young employee at Peace Tree Farm (Lloyd and his wife Candy's organic growing operation). Lloyd was espousing the cool features of a plant and the young employee says, "Yes, but what does it DO?"

To me, that sums up the way the younger generation views, well, pretty much everything in their lives. Lloyd added this Millennial generation isn't interested in the flowers; in fact, flowers are "background noise" for them. Let that sink in for a second. Pretty much everything we've done for the last 20-plus years has been about the flowers. Think back to the "What's in Flower Sells" mantra we've been living by for so long. Is that all about to change?

I think back, too, to a talk I attended many moons ago at the Big Retail Show in New York City, where a speaker made the point that older generations respond to many of the same hip marketing messages and trendy new store appearances as the younger generation. Why? Who wants to look out of touch and "not cool?" I feel that's relevant for this conversation because I think we as an industry feel if we shift our "look" and our "message," we're going to leave generations behind. I wonder if we're hand-wringing for no reason.

I'm not sure Apple worried about that when they launched the iPod. I'm sure they didn't worry about it when they launched the iPhone. Starbucks didn't concern themselves with what older people would think when they charged $5 for a Venti mocha frappuccino.

But those companies backed up their new creations and shifts in thinking with a cool factor. And that leads back to Lloyd's talk—what's your cool factor, if it's not the blooms? And it's not just the flowers, it's everything in the store. What makes you different from everyone else? "It's all about excellence," Lloyd told the crowd. "If it's not good enough to go in your home, why is it going in your store?"

Lloyd's talk was the impetus for Ellen's story this month on the unusual new introductions for 2016, to get the conversation started about what's different for next year. I really dug Amanda Thomsen's ideas in her column, too, including the concept that what we do right now is very foreign to a younger crowd. Judy Sharpton talks about the investments that need to be made for spring. These are great line items to jumpstart the spring overhaul. And, of course, you can find our IGC Show coverage from both events for all of those new products—there's definitely some wow factor in there.

We have to work on it, as an industry. The younger generation wants to create and that's what gardening is, right? The ultimate in creation. How do we help them in their gardening journey without alienating our existing customer base?

Having said that, I'd like to hear from retailers about their best promotions, events and marketing messages that were successful with Millennials. If you'd like to share something that worked for you, please email me at jpolanz@ballpublishing.com. **GP**