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## Connecting the Younger Gen

Jennifer Polanz



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Once upon a time, I was in that crowd of the “younger generation” when I first entered the industry. And then, seemingly all of the sudden, I wasn’t.

I’m realizing from my vantage point of cresting the hill toward 50 (not there yet, mind you, but closer every day) that it’s hard to know what the younger generation needs. It’s a completely different time—when I started in this business, the Internet was still growing, Amazon was best known for books and not a whole lot else, and Netflix still mailed out DVDs. I could go on, but the kids are cringing.

Today, the world is on demand, from same-day delivery to streaming services and any kind of content available immediately at your fingertips. It’s a much faster world, and the needs of young managers and owners are vastly different than they were 20-

plus years ago.

It’s a topic I asked this year’s Young Retailer Award winner, McKenzie Lain, about. She’s the general manager of her family’s store, Watters Garden Center in Prescott, Arizona. Specifically, I asked her where young people like herself find resources?

She said it was often through events and face-to-face meetings, sharing ideas and commiserating on the same issues everyone faces. But then she pointed out something that really stood out: “But I think seeing each other helps, as a younger group coming into the industry, we’re all kind of starting at the same place, almost.”

It came up at our awards dinner, too, at Cultivate in Columbus. That there’s a generation who came up in the industry together, who know they can reach out to each other when times are tough, to commiserate or even ask for help. They’re not alone. That’s what this newer generation needs, too. They need the ability to connect with each other to learn, to ask for help, find out about new trends and technology, to talk and just to know that there are others in the same place out there.

In person is always the best way to go and I encourage anyone in our industry to find events where you can connect with others. I mentioned Cultivate before and at Ball we recently hosted Ball Seed Customer Days to highlight new varieties, show off trial gardens and offer tent talks on a variety of topics. It was my first one (can you believe it?), but it won’t be my last. There are lots of industry events like that, and they’re a great opportunity to learn new things, meet new people and make those career-long (and possibly lifelong) connections.

Speaking of meeting people and learning things, this issue is chock-full of those two topics! First, if you don’t already

know her, you can “meet” McKenzie and read about how she found her way back into the business. Then you can learn all about the new technology that you may consider in the future for your IGC. Katie Elzer-Peters has that report.

Back to Cultivate, we’ve got the winners of this year’s Retailers’ Choice Awards. And you can get the inside scoop on how those awards happen every year in Bill McCurry’s column.

It’s a full house this month, too, with our full complement of columnists—Amanda Thomsen writing about snapping out of the every day, Katie Elzer-Peters continuing the topic of point-of-sale systems and John Friel working his magic from the annual Perennial Plant Association event. And, of course, we have Art Parkerson illuminating plants in pop culture—it’s a fascinating dive into how others use our products to make the connections that sell theirs.

I would love to hear your thoughts, too, on how we can help this younger generation make the connections they need to be successful in their careers in this industry. Reach out at [jpolanz@ballpublishing.com](mailto:jpolanz@ballpublishing.com). **GP**