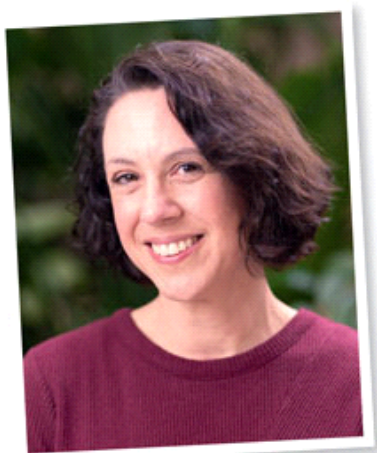


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Game Changers

Jennifer Polanz



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Virtually anything can be a catalyst for change. It can be a new hire or attending a session at a trade show that sparks creativity and explodes that little light bulb above your head. Or it can be implementing a new technology or changing the culture of the business from something toxic to uplifting and positive. In some cases, it can simply be keeping calm and staying focused (more on that in a bit).

In my interview with Brandon Kirby, this year's *Green Profit*/The Garden Center Group Young Retailer Award Winner, he mentioned how buying and implementing a point-of-sale system was a catalyst for change at his garden center, Rainbow Gardens in San Antonio, Texas. Prior to that, they were mostly operating on vibes, not on solid data. It was a big leap, but one that's paid off handsomely for them. It was just one piece of a larger puzzle when it came to improving operations.

It was a busy May Saturday afternoon when a greenhouse and storage area at Wallace's Garden Center caught fire. The story could have been about the fire, but instead it was about owner Kate Terrell's leadership and the team's ability to stay calm and focused as they got customers safely out, and immediately focused on what needed to be done. They were reopened within days, and Kate shared with longtime contributor Bill McCurry the lessons learned during that time.

I already highlighted one piece of technology that can be a game changer, but here's another: AI. And before you groan at the topic du jour, there's a reason you're hearing so much about it. It really can be useful in any operation,

from the smallest plant shop to the largest nursery or landscape operation. I admit, as a Gen Xer, the “Terminator 2” plot line is always in the back of my head, but even this skeptic can see the benefits of using AI to streamline everyday tasks and remove the potential for human error.

Clint Albin, who’s been in this industry for most of his life and is the CEO of A24 Consulting, is spearheading our dive into AI, and we begin with his guest column and overview on why retailers, growers and landscapers should be paying attention to it. In the coming months, we’ll take a look at key ways AI can be deployed to help you get time back into your schedule and reduce your workload, allowing you to focus on ways to grow your business. We’ll have articles and podcasts on a variety of topics related to the technology, so stay tuned on both fronts.

And, finally, sometimes a game changer can come in the form of a new product or line of products that spark interest and excitement in your customers. Perhaps you’ll find it in this year’s Retailers’ Choice Award Winners, picked by retailers like yourself at Cultivate’25. Ellen Wells recaps all 15 products. If you don’t find it there, go to *GrowerTalks* to see more products from the show.

I can tell you one catalyst for change in my personal life that has to do with my garden: fertilizer. I’ve always tried to be good about feeding my plants, but this year I tried harder and—shocking, I know—my flowers were more floriferous and more beautiful than ever before, and my veggies produced more than in the past. Part of this I attribute to better genetics; I think annuals get tougher every year and veggies produce more yield than ever before thanks to the fine breeders in our industry. But the other part is actually keeping up with them with water and fertilizer. Who knew? (I know, you did.) **GP**