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Lessons From the Ice

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I'll let you in on a little secret: I am a huge fan of the sport of figure skating. Like, huge. I'm so pumped for the Winter Olympics this year, and I thought I'd share some insight into a few of the Team USA skaters to watch and the lessons I've learned from them that also translate to our industry. There are four disciplines at the Olympics: men's singles and women's singles, pairs and ice dance.

The first lesson: you never know what will go viral, and when it does, it can help define you. American ice dance team Madison Chock and Evan Bates learned that years ago when their sultry snake charmer program went viral on YouTube, resulting in millions of views and new notoriety. They've worked hard and capitalized, becoming a favorite for Olympic gold in Milan. This time around you'll see their interpretive "Paint it Black" flamenco-style/bull fighting free dance (you have to see it to get it—just know Evan's the Bull).

In the women's event, we can all learn from Amber Glenn, an American skater who's bravely talked openly about her mental health struggles and the impact of her ADHD diagnosis on her skating. While it's challenging, it's important to not shy away from these topics, but to explore them (it reminds me of the packed house during a Cultivate session on professional burnout last year—we're going to talk more about that in the magazine this year, too). To help Amber get through her four-minute free skate—it doesn't sound long, but it's an eternity on the ice—her choreography includes spaces for breath and recovery. It's made a big difference in her success.

Also for the women there's Alysa Liu, who you might remember from the 2022 Olympics in Beijing. She retired (at the age of 16) after that event. To many fans' surprise and excitement, she came out of retirement in 2024 and something was noticeably different. She had a complicated relationship with skating before, and now she is skating for the pure joy and love of the sport. Of course, Alysa trains hard, too, but don't ever underestimate the value of loving what you're doing. It shines through.

When it comes to technical execution, there's no one better than men's skater Ilia Malinin, the favorite for gold. The first to land a quad Axel in competition, and the potential to skate a seven-quad program at the Olympics, he's pushing the bounds of the sport and creating new ways to wow audiences. He invented a move called the Raspberry Twist and he incorporates a now-legal backflip in his free skate. There are a couple of lessons here: sometimes a little swagger is OK if you can back it up (he usually does), and pushing the boundaries breathes fresh

life into tired spaces and gives others permission to change things, too.

The lesson from pairs is one of determination. There's no clear favorite yet as I write this, and several pairs will work their hardest to get named to the Olympic team. They'll keep pushing for their chance at that podium.

We've got stories in this issue that complement some of these lessons nicely, too. This issue marks the start of a monthly series in 2026 from three global garden center consultants—John Stanley, Sid Raisch and Dries Jansen—about the future of retail that I imagine will be pushing some boundaries. It's called "Adapt or Die."

Senior Editor-at-Large Ellen Wells' dive into ways to make poinsettias shine can help breathe new life into a commodity plant. I knew I wanted a story on unique holidays to give plants as gifts and I knew the perfect person to write it—Maria Zampini. You can expand your gift-giving promotions ideas with her. Then roll right in to the pure joy of retailing Christmas from DeWayne's Christmas Land.

And, finally, you'll find our annual Salary & Benefits Survey results, where we asked about strategies for scheduling employees with the goals of high retention rates and work-life balance (back to the mental health aspect). We found employers engaging with and listening to their employees' needs.

There's lots more great stuff in this issue, and lots more to talk about for the Olympics, but I'll leave it here for now. Have a great start to the New Year!
Here's to the lessons we've learned. **GP**