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Staying Connected

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Mental health is always a difficult topic to talk about. It's something that's deeply personal, and with issues like depression or burnout, it can be hard to tell you're even in it. With peak spring approaching, though, it's important we put it on our radar for ourselves and our team members. Whether it's March or May, it's a gauntlet for everyone from the corporate level down to the waterers, car loaders and cashiers at retail.

At last year's Cultivate, I watched a conference room full of people searching for answers while speaker Megan Taylor Morrison talked about burnout. I also watched during a session as one retailer went through an exercise of plotting out two courses of action: one that involved staying in the business and the other getting out of it. It was emotional—she loved aspects of the business, but it was just so difficult in a lot of ways, financially, physically and mentally.

You would think an industry built on beautifying the world would be all, well, sunshine and roses. But it's not. It can be a grind that can deplete even the strongest personalities. And I think we need to talk about that more. A lot more.

When looking specifically at burnout, are there ways to reduce or spread out the workload? Is the independent nature of a lot of our growers and retailers part of what makes it so tough, and are there organizations or groups that can help streamline processes? There's a new generation that's been coming in and reworking businesses for a while. Have they had more success at work-life balance where their parents and grandparents just gutted it out?

These are all topics I'd like to explore a lot more in the magazine. We're starting with a follow-up from Megan on that Cultivate session with her story about combatting burnout. She shows us what to look for and how to respond accordingly. It's a first step in watching out for your team.
In his monthly Profit column, Bill McCurry touches on an area that increases stress throughout the upper management chain: lack of communication about the health of the business. Understanding where the business is at financially empowers managers and helps to build a strong leadership team.

Something that can often get lost when a team is struggling is the customer experience. It can be hard enough to keep the lights on and the plants healthy, and offering an above-average experience is just one more challenge, but an important one to keep the business healthy. Expert guest writer Dan Gingiss provides some insight into how to

gauge your customers' experience and how a focus group can help provide answers. We can all learn a lot just by asking the right questions and listening.

There are lots of other great features in this issue to explore, like Ellen Wells' discussion with four container designers on their favorite shrubs and how to use them to elevate mixed containers to the next level. Then see the latest in self-watering containers from freelance writer Jessie Keith. These containers can help customers stay successful with their plantings all through the summer heat.

As I wrap up, I want to share something. I have had periods of what I would consider burnout over the last couple of years. Sometimes it coincides with gray winters in Cleveland, which makes it even rougher. Going to industry events and talking with people helps rejuvenate me and remember why I love what I do. I've found for me, it's important not to become isolated, but to go out and talk with others to see what they're doing. Staying connected is important.

BUT, having said that, it's also vital to get professional help if other avenues aren't working. There are some things you can't pull yourself out of on your own. If that's the case, there's an easy number to call: 988. You can call, text or chat this confidential line. Please make sure your team knows there's help available, whether it's for burnout or any other mental health challenge they may be experiencing.

Here's to staying healthy! **GP**