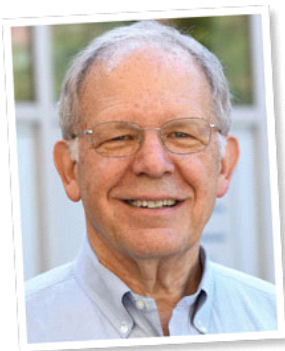


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AI Can Be Your Friend. Really.

Bill McCurry



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“AI has helped me identify and build solutions to key constraints in my business, particularly around financial decision-making,” said Rory Tyer, new owner of South Pleasantville Nursery in Greenville, South Carolina.

Rory was an executive coach and consultant who frequently traveled for work. Finally, tired of being away from his family, he learned about buying local businesses. He and his wife fell in love with the nursery. Rory approached the owner, asking if he would sell. He would, and the Tyers took it over.

Rory knew that technology and automation could streamline business operations, but he had neither an IT background nor a large budget. When he started experimenting with AI, he suddenly found far more possibilities than he'd expected.

Rory always watched what was new and investigated different AI platforms. He looked at the creative uses others learned with technology. After a lot of experimenting, he developed custom, decision-making data for himself and his team. In hours he accomplished what would have taken days manually. One dashboard shows Rory his cash position, inventory position, incoming orders, this week's/month's/annual labor and margin trends, inventory aging, as well as which products are selling out quicker than anticipated (better reorder or find substitutes) and which are behind plan (make a plan to liquidate it).

Rory's main theme is to consider the constraints that keep your business from doing what you need. He “hired” Claude AI and verbally spelled out his frustrations, then demanded, “Analyze my business against the book ‘Theory of Constraints’ by Bob Sproull.”

He also asked Claude to design tools to eradicate those constraints. Because AI may not always be correct, Rory reviewed and resubmitted the information to request changes. Finally, he asked Claude to write tips so his team could maximize each newly created tool.

Rory boils it down to a three-step process:

1. Identify your constraints. Get clear on what results you'd see if you could flip a switch and change things. AI can help if you tell it to interview you. This background context about you and your business will help

later output.

2. Invest time and curiosity into a single platform for at least a month. Don't assume you need a plan. Ask the platform to form a plan and do it. A \$20 monthly subscription gets you access to the most powerful/accurate models. Based on usage, you can decide later if a higher subscription is worthwhile.
3. As you experiment, get ideas from others (AI can recommend who to learn from).

AI isn't really about writing code. For example, "Our parking lot isn't big enough" doesn't have a coding solution. Try treating AI like a seasoned consultant. Describe your parking lot issues and see what advice you're given. It'll likely be more helpful than you imagined.

Rory got on my radar screen by doing a webinar for The Garden Center Group. Danny Summers, the group's Chief Instigator, allowed me to sit in on Rory's session with them. Rory's approach to a complicated subject gave a new perspective a non-techie could effectively use with AI. Any serious retailer should listen to this presentation. Get In Touch with Danny (thegardencentergroup.com) for the link.

Rory's ability to garner great results was driven by his commitment to keep talking to Claude. Make it a point to "hire" an AI and interact with it daily about your business. Eventually, your AI will understand what you need to know, while it brings in new perspectives you haven't imagined. Rory is interested in helping other businesses, too. You can reach him at rory@spnursery.com.

Disclosure: The Garden Center Group sponsors *Green Profit's* Young Retailer Award, where Danny Summers and I serve as volunteer judges. I also volunteer with Danny on Retailer's Choice at Cultivate and Cool Products during TPIE. I have no economic relationship with The Group. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 731-8389.