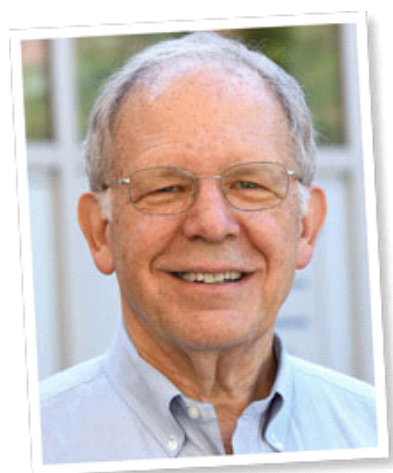


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Sometimes It Takes a Group ...

Bill McCurry



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When Liz Lark-Riley became general manager of Rockledge Gardens (Rockledge, Florida) in July 2019, she realized she didn't know what she didn't know. She immediately called each of the subject matter experts available from The Garden Center Group.

"Rockledge Gardens is all about peace, health and making the world a better place. How can I accomplish that? What should I know to run this third-generation family business?"

Access to experienced experts in various disciplines gave Liz the chance to learn from people who understood the real world of garden centers. The business has been a member of The Garden Center Group (GCG or "The Group") since 1998.

GCG's answers focused Liz on areas for the greatest and fastest improvement. They also identified which areas didn't need her immediate attention so she could focus first on the most important things.

"Ego-free ideas flow under the radar screen at gatherings of The Garden Center Group. What's special to me is you can meet peers and confidentially talk about sensitive issues not understood by those outside our industry."

Equally important, you're interacting with a variety of "service providers" in accounting, finance, marketing, display, human resources, production and other disciplines. These informal contacts erase the reluctance to approach "experts" for conversation or advice.

Liz says, "I found The Group experts to be open and able to share expertise and opinions without judgment or bias. I've had formal education and experience in a variety of fields, but this is my vocation. However, just because I love it doesn't mean I know everything I need to know. GCG has been instrumental in my ability to grow and learn how best to guide Rockledge Gardens. I'm still listening to the new people I meet through the group."

Even before COVID-19, ours was a challenging industry. Things moved fast and owners/managers felt increasingly "lonely at the top." The absence of gatherings like MANTS, Cultivate, IGC Show, etc. increased that loneliness. When garden center operators are uncertain they seek different perspectives to understand the dynamics of the industry. Industry experts and successful retailers may not give you the love family advisers do, but they present the real world you live in, not the way you'd like the world to be.

“Personnel is part of my job. I ensure our employees have every opportunity to be successful” is how Phyllis Rollins, assistant general manager of Fairview Garden Center (Raleigh, North Carolina) describes her position. Fairview belongs to The Garden Center Group, which provides Phyllis with access to the HR management consulting firm Seawright & Associates.

“Every HR situation is unique and some can be emotionally charged,” said Phyllis. “Jean Seawright is quick to respond and shows me ways to resolve situations fairly and promptly. You can’t be an ostrich with your head in the ground. HR problems don’t go away by themselves. We must manage them to the best outcome possible.”

For those situations that don’t seem to improve, Phyllis calls Jean for ideas about a strategy to prompt the necessary behavior change. Like all good managers, Phyllis hates to terminate people, but understands sometimes it’s the only option.

“Nobody should be surprised they are terminated. They should be given ample opportunity for adjustment.”

The Group has many experts in multiple areas. What is the secret behind these garden centers’ successes? Could it be the organization gives them great mentors with whom to speak and learn? **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) 688-1169.