

Kiss My Aster

3/1/2023

Maybe the Kids ARE Alright

Amanda Thomsen



Amanda Thomsen

Right after I opened the shop last July, a bouncing ball of energy flapped through my front door going on about the price of the bay trees I had for sale being so much lower than the price of grocery store bay leaves that it couldn't be correct. I assured this kid that, indeed, that's the way the cookie crumbles. He went outside and grabbed one from the display in front of the shop and bought it. The whole interaction was memorable in that this 16-year-old kid was delighted by the bay laurel being a real thing and not just a crispy ingredient for stew and also that this kid knew the price of grocery store bay leaves.

He left and came back seven minutes later in hard sales mode. He told me he was a 16-year-old orchid collector and that he should work here; he told me he grows bananas and oleanders and ... whoosh, it was too much. He was bobbing around as he regaled me of his plant successes. I gave him a

paper application and asked him to write down all these crazy skills he was telling me about on the back. I still have it, as now Tyler has been a beloved employee for six months and he's trying to figure out how to rent the apartment upstairs.

It says:

- "1. I am a part of the Illinois Orchid Society and I'm very knowledgeable on the subject of orchids.
2. I can provide plants to sell in the store.
3. I've been interested in plants for my entire life.
4. You'll learn a lot about me and how I can effectively help your business grow."

That last one had me banging my head against my desk even though I called and hired him the next day.

Here's what I've learned about hiring a kid with lots of plant passion, but no retail experience:

- I've had to remind him not to mention plants he bought at the grocery store for \$8 or tell customers what wholesalers I've bought things at more than a few times. His exuberance sometimes short-circuits his good sense.
- Before I let him run full-force into a solo project we talk about what I want, as well as an even more clear explanation of what I don't want. I let him make mistakes so he learns because, sheesh, we know I sure made plenty

back in the day. Remember when I flipped over a golf cart with the boxes of alphabetized plant signage for the upcoming year and it all fell out into the mud? I sure do.

- The hardest and best part of having a Tyler is that I have to pump him up IRL and on social media so that when customers come in, they know that this youngster in a sweatsuit is knowledgeable and can efficiently help them with all their needs. I introduce him to customers all the time, I talk him up and tell Tyler stories online to the point where there's a Team Tyler Fan Club.
- He's often late for work—sometimes REALLY late. He sleeps through six or seven alarms. If there's anything I know in the world it's that being a growing teenager is HARD and when he shows up contrite three hours later he's also a half an inch taller. Growing is hard work and I'm happy to be in a situation where I can look at his tardiness as just three hours I didn't have to pay him for. I know it's not always so easy.
- Speaking of that, I just feed him as much as possible. There are snacks and drinks and we get food delivered on weekends.
- His unbridled enthusiasm is getting more bridled, but frankly, his weird ideas are often not that far off. He does want to keep plants as "store plants" and not sell them pretty much with every plant. Recently, I allowed him a 7-ft. Norfolk that we just won't sell, according to him. Sales of 6-in. Norfolks are now through the roof. Who knew?

According to Tyler, he knew. **GP**

Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author. Her blog is planted at KissMyAster.com and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.