

How newcomers and millennials will succeed in the green industry[©]

E. Hallum^a

Mountain Creek Nursery, 941 Scenic Hills Drive, McMinnville, Tennessee 37110, USA.

CHALLENGES IN THE NURSERY INDUSTRY

How will students, newcomers, and the young at heart succeed in the green industry? All that is required is to shift your mindset and proactively solve problems and seize opportunities. I will explain how successful men and women will grow in their careers and businesses in the green industry.

Starting with the major challenges before us – we produce live, green, perishable goods. Some people even think of us as luxury. I am one of them, but “luxury” is not a dirty word. Consider the multi-million dollar pet industry. In 2010, Americans spent \$47.7 billion on pet products and services. In 2008, total U.S. sales in the green industry was \$176 billion <http://horttech.ashspublications.org/content/21/5/628.full.pdf+html>. Yet, we are classified as a maturing industry. The green industry is in a period of hyper competition <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/faculty/hall/publications/2010%2008%20Making%20Cents%20of%20Green%20Industry.pdf>, and we are in a race to the bottom in the nursery business – competing on price. Academic opportunities and research funding can be scarce.

The nursery industry is also highly manual-labor intensive. Live goods are capital intensive. How are we ever going to overcome these tremendous challenges? I see opportunity, possibly more than ever before. The first and most important step is to change your mind set. The problems I described are framed by scarcity. We must change our mind set from scarcity to abundance. We are not going to solve these tough problems and create new opportunities without changing how we think.

DEFINING SUCCESS

How do you define success? It is a vague term and everyone has a different definition. I define success in terms of freedom and having creative control of my time. For green industry professionals, I define success as getting better every day. Your definition will be completely different and can change over time. It is important that you know what you want so that you can overcome adversity.

We are not going to solve our problems and create opportunities without trial and error. If you are new or young at heart, you will make mistakes. Losses are lessons, just try to not make the same mistake twice!

THE PARETO PRINCIPLE (80/20 ANALYSIS)

There are many problems to solve, so how do you focus and create success? Apply 80/20 analysis to your business, or career <http://betterexplained.com/articles/understanding-the-pareto-principle-the-8020-rule/>. Whether it is propagation, production, or research, 80% of your results are generated from 20% of your actions.

Now apply 80/20 to 80/20. The result is 64/4. Four percent of what you do produces 64% of the results! I believe the timing of when you take action is the 4%.

Several years ago I focused on improving irrigation timing and fertilizer rates. We were able to grow *Betula nigra* 'Cully', Heritage[®] river birch 100% faster by increasing the fertilizer rate per cubic yard and reducing the irrigation duration. That eliminated a year of crop production and it increased our growing area. It was like we just did a 300 socket expansion. Most importantly, the customer received a superior product and we became more profitable with less effort and inputs.

^aE-mail: ehallum@gmail.com

FINDING YOUR STRENGTHS

Now that we know about the Pareto Principle (80/20 Analysis), what do we do with all this free time? Well what are you good at? I recommend everyone take a personality test if you have not already done so. I like *Strengths Finder 2.0* by Tom Rath (ISBN: 9781595620156). In 30 min you will know what your top five strengths are. Play to your strengths and create more success with your thoughts and actions.

MAKE A CHECK LIST

You might be thinking...but I am so busy already! I challenge you to replace yourself in your current situation. How do you do this? You create systems in your business and career. Start documenting the routine tasks you do. Make a checklist. Keep it to yourself for now. I took my irrigation job and formed it into a system. Now two other people are capable of checking irrigation daily and I focus on something new and more important.

You will do more in less time using a checklist or system. You will be able to incorporate more split testing. Test A is your control. It is how you grow and work now — your benchmark. Test B manipulates a variable, with the goal of doing better than your control. Once you have your work system you can start asking yourself: WHY are we doing this anyway? Does it make sense?

Most processes and work flows at Mountain Creek Nursery exist today because it was always been done this way. What does that mean? Well Mountain Creek Nursery was a soil-grown tree B&B nursery prior to its current container tree focus. Just because you pruned a certain way or harvested this way in the field does not translate exactly to the container yard. Start testing ideas and assumptions. In the tree business we get one crop turn a year. You must test assumptions. Your competitors are testing every day — and your nursery is getting farther and farther behind!

SERVICE-BASED BUSINESS

Now I want to focus on service-based businesses. The service based business has the opportunity for recurring revenue or income. Newspapers and magazines have been using the subscription model for decades. Anyone can market and sell information on the internet. You do not have to be picked anymore. Choose yourself and get started if you have something valuable to say or share.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Finally, I believe we are about to enter a golden age of entrepreneurship. Businesses are created when you get one customer. Test your idea by offering it to customers. Do not spend too much money creating a product or service nobody wants. Let your income lead your expenses and do not quit your day job until you reach 50% of your monthly expenses.

The best information and advice in the world is meaningless without taking action. Identify your challenges and apply your strengths and 80/20 analysis. Test ideas in your systems and remember: timing is critical to your success.

Can you change your mind set and continue to succeed? Yes, of course. Will you change how you think? I look forward to hearing about your success at next year's meeting!