



Everything's In Bloom Series

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The Everything's In Bloom series

May seems like just the right month to take a look at companies and the people in them from the perspective of a gardener. All gardens like companies are a lot of work and there are actually many similarities.

We all celebrate a wonderful producing garden with its bouquets of color and scent. It makes all of the hard work, the planning and the maintenance worthwhile. Within this series you will find stories about people, key elements that need attention and a few best practices that you may want to implement in your company. We hope that you will enjoy the series.

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Happy May Day!

First of all, Happy May Day!

May 1 is celebrated in many ways around the world. It is a celebration of the end of winter, darkness, and scarcity. It is often includes a core element such as a May Pole festooned with ribbons and flowers as a center point for celebrations. In some countries, the May Pole is used to bring communities together in celebration and in others the planting of a May Pole in the yard of someone you care about is an invitation to a life-long dance. It is a celebration of all that blooms.



Happy May Day!

Today we begin a new series, “Everything’s in Bloom”. Every bloom is the result of hard work, processes and a part of a plan. All blooms also have a purpose beyond the beauty that may capture our eye. Nothing is an accident even if it seems to appear by chance in nature.

This month will bring the opportunity to look at how business blooms. What it takes to plan, nurture and grow. Fighting pests and problems as well as the maintenance needed when things grow too big or begin to take over and when they do not flourish.

I love the vision of the businesses that I have the privilege to work with picking up their virtual ribbon to join the dance and celebrate all that blooms in their businesses. I get to be the proud spectator; cheering, orchestrating the music that drives the momentum and challenging bystanders to participate.

Celebrate May Day, pick up your ribbon and join the dance.

Success in Bloom

When we talk about everything being in bloom, the focus is on the beautiful presence that often captures our senses with delight. Rarely do we think of what it took to create the bloom when we are admiring it or what will follow as a part of the life cycle. We also rarely stop to think of the conditions that made the bloom possible. If you think about it, businesses, business activities, business events and business people are like blooms.



Success in Bloom

- **Environment** – One environment does not fit all. Environment is more than the climate. The environment must include a need for the product or service, timing, compatibility, and consumer fit. The climate has to be hospitable and able to support the business so that it will be able to bloom.
- **Planting** – Establishing the business or a new business initiative is never casual. Within each environment there are conditions that will change the method of planting and expectations for growth. With a plant that will bloom, you would consider soil type, depth for planting and sunlight. In a business you will consider location as the soil type, whether a physical or virtual presence. Integration to the consumer and business community are the depth and opportunity is the sunlight.
- **Nurturing** – Many volunteer plants and accidental businesses flourish by circumstance rather than design. The blooms that are the best, most prolific and create the most impact are given additional care, nurturing in terms of feeding, care, maintenance and tending. It is no different with businesses you want to grow and see bloom. It is rare that accidents enjoy the success of well-planned and developed businesses nurtured by their owners.
- **Seeding the Future** – a bloom begins the seed that starts spreads and regenerates the plant or business. While the fade of a bloom may be considered the beginning of the end, it is usually just the opposite – new and expanded beginnings. Each person we touch and see bloom, each opportunity brought to bloom and the bloom for business begin the opportunity to grow, expand and bloom again.

The businesses, initiatives and people I have the opportunity to grow through the right environment, care in planting, tender nurturing and seeding for the future bring the greatest rewards. Even if everything is not perfect; bloom where you are planted. Your bloom is a testament to your success.

Weeds in Bloom

Weeds bloom just like any other plant. There are weeds in gardens and in companies. Weeds have a special type of beauty when in bloom. We are often intrigued as well as frustrated by their vitality, whether or not they are wanted. They are often perfect within their own right, but do not conform to the ideal cultivated. The survival of weeds is interesting, even where they are offered little hospitality they exhibit strength and will to be a part of the landscape that by comparison makes others appear weak. Their persistence is challenging, sometimes obnoxious and given a chance, they will take over.



Weeds in Bloom

The determination of whether it is a weed or a preferred specimen is often a determination of preference, purpose and dominance. Nurturing and nourishing will strengthen everything that shares the same environment. Maintenance and selection determine whether or not the weed will be allowed to stay. Aligning the weed to be utilized with purpose may not make the weed the preferred specimen but may allow it to serve its purpose. The same holds true in the business world too.

Archie was a weed in the office. He sat directly behind me at one of my first jobs and did everything he could to make his presence known. He was not a handsome man and certainly did not practice the best personal hygiene habits. I will never forget him clipping his fingernails throughout each sales meeting. The attention to the length of his fingernails was not needed, especially during meetings. I doubt that very many heard what was going on as it was just a little clip, click and movement that would only irritate those closest to him.

He often uttered statements under his breath when he disagreed with something that was said and had no problem interrupting the boss if he felt that what he had to say was important, whether or not it was germane to the topic.

Many of us had complained about his obnoxious behavior, non-compliant work methodologies and that he just did not seem to fit the culture of the company. You could say that he did not bring out the best in us. No one could understand why he was kept with the company. His production was always just above minimum standards and usually not in the target market of the company. Many of his deals were full of trouble from start to finish.

One day after a particularly obnoxious display that even took the boss by surprise, the boss told Archie that he would give the office the right to fire him since he had offended everyone. He told Archie to prepare to state his case for remaining to the entire office the next day. The company would prepare an overview to cite the reasons why he had been hired and retained. People who wanted to speak for or against Archie would have the opportunity, but were asked to also let the boss know in advance. There would not be impromptu opportunities and it would not be a bashing session.

The next day, Archie came prepared. He had dressed up and cleaned up as much as possible. He had notes in hand and carried his head a bit bowed like a dog that had been reprimanded. Everyone felt a bit of remorse for having complained. The meeting was called to order and the boss went first with the company overview.

He explained that each of us had been hired because we brought something that no one else in the company did, making a complimentary group with few that encroached on others. Archie, he explained, served a cultural segment of the market that would not be served by anyone else. While these were not the highest volume transactions, they represented a steady market that not only contributed dollars but, more importantly, were a part of the chain that fueled the transactions most of us preferred. Without Archie, someone else would have to be recruited to serve that segment of the market. Facts and numbers were presented with an ending statement that no one was irreplaceable.

Archie took his turn next. He told us a little about his background, he had come to this country with little except ambition and a desire to make a better life for his family. The ethnic circles he joined were tight and welcoming which presented a wonderful business opportunity. His circles were proud that he had been hired into our office as it represented his achievement. They wanted to work with Archie through our office, as it was the visualization and actualization of the American Dream. He was sincerely apologetic for his behavior and said if allowed to stay, he would do his best to be a part of the office rather than trying to get our attention.

The room was silent. Those who planned to speak declined the opportunity. The boss addressed us all and explained that just like in a garden; there have to be plants of all kinds to make sure that the garden is healthy. The weeds, moss and ground plants often keep the dirt from washing away from the preferred specimens and if managed make the garden more stable and healthy. Each has a purpose and managed to that purpose with control everything will bloom.

The vote was taken. Archie remained. He became a solid contributor and worked hard to channel his need for attention to productive results. We all celebrated the weed in bloom the first time he made salesman of the month.

Turning Dirt

Every good gardener knows that to have a great garden with blooms and yield you have to work the dirt. Not just when you create the garden but as a part of maintenance.

Working the dirt means more than weeding, managing growth, watering and adding fertilizer. Over time, the dirt settles and has a tendency to compact constricting root growth. Nutrients that once made the ground fertile are eroded or exhausted unless replenished. More dirt may need to be added. The great gardener works the dirt making sure that it will encourage new growth and sustain viability.

It is the same for companies. Making a company bloom means having to work on the company to make sure that the attention of leadership goes deeper than what can be seen in a quick look.

Turning the dirt in companies starts with the decision of whether it is maintenance with a shovel, leaving the garden intact, or a full turnover - in essence using a plow or rototiller.

Using the plow or rototiller method is a full upheaval. This method demonstrates a decision that there is a new approach, business model and little of the old is needed other than a footprint. Turning the dirt is only a part of the process and plan. It will require repopulation with transplants and/or fresh new people, ideas and methodologies.

The shovel or trowel method is more selective and is an effective part of a maintenance program. The footprint remains as well as most of the people, production, methods and models. Care in turning the dirt is important so that roots are not disturbed while making sure that there is room for growth.

Selection will also be a part of the process, removing the weak and spent, replacing with fresh and new.

Turning the dirt is never enough. Old dirt turned by either method is still old dirt. Rejuvenating it usually requires adding something. Old material repurposed and turned under as compost becomes a nutrient and promotes healthy growth. Aerification, especially if augmented by a medium to make sure that the air space is maintained for new growth, can be valuable. In business, this means placeholders and positioning for expanded business. Fertilizer can be new ideas, new markets, and the planting of new people.

As you think about the garden that is your company, act as a master gardener would. If you want long term results with a company that blooms and grows, producing a great yield, you will need to turn the dirt. Deciding how much and timing will impact your return on investment.



Turning Dirt

Deadheading

In most blooming gardens and businesses “deadheading” is necessary to make sure that the blooms continue. In my gardens, I have a lot of Knockout Roses. The first blooms of the season are stupendous, a brilliant show of color. Then they fade and look me in the face tired, ready to go to seed, ending the cycle of their usefulness. Behind them on new growth shoots, new buds will turn in to blooms but there is no way that they have their day unless I deadhead the old. Deadheading never kills the plant, always promoting new growth and blooms.



Deadheading

The same is true in my business garden, unless I keep the stream of activities, people and ideas fresh, only the old will remain.

So how do you deadhead a business? In some ways it is very similar, you have to continuously promote new growth and blooming, having given due appreciation to the old but making sure that what is already tired and spent is not the face of your company. Those ready to go to seed must be planted separately if you want it them grow and eventually bloom.

- **People** – Almost everyone has new growth within them just waiting to be given a moment in the sunshine but if recognition, reward, leadership and motivation systems do not make sure these have a chance, you will not experience the excitement that new growth can bring. Those who are truly spent need an exit strategy that allows their seed to be planted and grow anew.
- **Activities** – Change things up. Yes there are some things that need to be done as a part of a process, but putting a new twist or emphasis can make the process new again. It may be a new person in the mix, a shortcut or even a celebration of things that are right but otherwise unnoticed.
- **Ideas** – Ideas are the blooms of business that inspire and are admired. It is also innovation through ideas put to work that take companies to the next level. New ideas are often the buds that are hidden behind the faded flowers. They are ready for the chance to bloom. If you do not deadhead the old, you never fully enjoy the show.

Deadheading is not a perfect art or science, but it is a necessity. It is rare, but, especially if I am hurried or tired, I sometimes accidentally take new buds with the old flowers. It is also not without risk and challenge. It is rare that I emerge from a session of deadheading without some scrapes as I always encounter some stubborn thorns in the path. Regardless of which garden I am tending, flowers, my business or the business of a client, when the deadheading session is over there is a whole new look that is fresh, worthy of appreciation and most of all showing the next set of fresh buds ready to bloom.

Pruning

Yesterday we talked about deadheading. **Deadheading** is different from pruning. Deadheading is working on the surface, improving appearance and encouraging growth. Pruning is more strategic and surgical, making changes that impact the shape, viability and most future growth. Pruning is either a part of a plan and maintenance or a way to deal with a critical problem. Whether the pruning is done in the garden or a company, it is an important part of making sure that you get the results you want.



Pruning

Companies need to consider pruning a part of their regular maintenance program and operational design. It helps drive efficiencies and optimize results when carefully executed. Consider the following before you start.

- **Information** – Pruning requires that you have good information before you begin. Not everything can be pruned and, in some cases, requires a specific approach that may or may not help you meet your objective. An example would be that since many businesses utilize the Internet heavily, there is a great temptation to attack physical space first, reducing the footprint and the cost. Without careful evaluation and information regarding the cause and effect you may make a mistake and in the worst case scenarios – the front door on your virtual location is not friendly or able to handle the business requirements but you are penalized by the landlord by paying for space you no longer occupy. Add to the injury if your staff, business community and customers do not have the information they need to accept what they view as too deep a cut.
- **Intent** – All pruning should be objective based, rather than because you think you should make cuts. It is also impossible to save your way to wealth. Even if you cut, there will be other investments you make. Are you able to accomplish your intended result if you cut and cannot make the related investments? Over the past few years staffing has often been cut so severely that no one, including the owner, accomplishes what they need to. It feels like the business is in a continuous loop of simply trying to tread water and not making any forward movement. Even if the immediate intent is survival, is it a result worthy of continuance or is it simply a delay of the inevitable. In some cases, the requirement is more than pruning.
- **Plan** – Your pruning of any one area must be a part of an overall plan that meets your vision and requirements. There is nothing worse than when you look at a landscape and it looks like the local kindergarten class had been turned loose. In companies, if your plan does not integrate any area impacted by the pruning, you will most likely have to stop the process once started and it is often costly.

- **Timing** – Pruning requires timing. Pruning at the wrong time or too often may cause irreparable damage and either stunt or destroy what you are pruning. An example that recently occurred was when a company, in making staffing cuts, decided to release a key person from his responsibilities. They were looking at the budget and not the impact. The person was their key person and the only person with the relationships and credentials to deal with a labyrinth of government requirements. They were in the middle of government required documents with a due date that would literally stop them from being able to sell their product. Additionally, he was the only one who knew how to steer the newest initiative they had already announced through the same labyrinth.
- **Risk** – Pruning always has risk. Even if you are a pro at pruning, not everything will survive the cuts. Even with the best information, you do not know how things you do not control will impact what you have cut. Very recently a company that made some cuts and realigned people as well as roles - in essence transplanting, knew that there would be some loss. That was already a part of the plan. What was not in the plan is the immediacy of the reaction creating a brain drain and probably challenges in relationships. They may end up with all bosses and no workers. The cut will be below the graft.
- **Reward** – When you are done pruning, what will you have achieved through your pruning. Will new growth start from deeper within rather than just on the surface? Will deadwood be eliminated? Will the impact of the results and the new growth occur fast enough or are you going to be looking at the barren nubs when everyone else has blooms reaping the fruit of their labor.

It is easy to get carried away when pruning, as there is a certain power that comes with the work that may take on a life of its own. Taking a bit of time to go through the points listed before pruning will ensure that your result delivers the blooms you want to see.

Nurturing

Each time I plan a garden I visualize the garden in bloom, well ahead of buying the first plant or seed. The garden will be a part of the landscape, nested with other gardens and plantings accented and defined by hardscape thoughtfully placed.



Nurturing

As the seedling breaks the ground or the first new growth shows the plant has taken root in its new surroundings there is a sense of joy and pride. There is a strong desire to make sure that this new part of the garden grows and becomes everything it should be.

That desire to nurture is a part of us and something very difficult to suppress. Whether we are helping children, new careers, new ideas or a new company to grow, we want to be a part of it, taking an active role, contributing and celebrating.

The benefit is far more than the growth we get to see and encourage. It renews us from the inside out. We have the tendency to see everything around us with a new perspective and sometimes notice things that have been there all along and failed to catch our attention. It forces us to slow our busy pace for a moment, as new growth demands attention. We re-prioritize and re-evaluate with the new perspective and possibilities including what we see in new growth.

Taking the same benefits and making nurturing activities a proactive part of your leadership, business plan and personnel development will bring surprising results.

One way in which some companies have implemented nurturing programs is to encourage executives to mentor younger people in the company who demonstrate promise and initiative. The executives who take on the role are busy people for whom time is a precious commodity. They may only meet with the person they are mentoring a few times in person, but will have many formats of communications in which there is an exchange of information, ideas, expertise and perspective. Both will grow greatly as a result since the mentee reaches for a higher bar of performance than would have been a part of their traditional growth paths. The mentor experiences the perspective of someone who is in a learning mode rather than the conditioned information often given by people who want to climb the ladder.

Another type of nurturing program is in the format of individual and/or focus group projects to turn attention to a component of the company that is ripe for renewal. It may be a process, information, or marketing. An objective and vision is set with a timeline for the results and suggestions to be returned.

Some companies use competitive initiatives to drive nurturing programs. Different than normal production achievement, these utilize group tactics, strategies, momentum and team dynamics. Nomenclature is applied which incites creativity, competitive passion and in some cases roles that will create a temporary alter ego. Fun is a key component and the opportunity to bring new leadership to the forefront builds new skills.

Simple more passive methodologies can be a posted idea or thought of the day, an inspirational quote shared or even simply taking a few minutes to talk to someone with genuine interest in what they are doing and giving an idea or two to make their results better or job easier.

No matter what your style of nurturing is, it will bring a return on your investment as you watch the new seedlings grow to bring blooms and fruits of your labor to your garden – soon, everything's in bloom.

Annuals, Perennials & Trees

I have always tried to plan and plant my gardens so that something is in bloom all of the time. This means thinking about which plants bloom at specific times during the year. Pansies bloom most of the winter here but when the heat begins to build, the only real option is to take them out and replace them. I really like annuals like pansies but the time, work and need to replace them seasonally make these far less desirable than blooming shrubs and trees that I can count on year after year or the perennials that come back each year providing a great show and little work.



Annuals, Perennials and Trees

There is suitability to the climate, timing and relationship to other plants to be considered as well as how the plant fits into the plan for the garden. It is the same for businesses. Using the analogy of the garden in planning production of a business, a company can override many seasonal issues and eliminate the swings in revenue and profitability these create. This is especially true in sales businesses.

Newly hired sales people in most industries have a fairly high attrition rate. Sales as a career is not for everyone, especially those that do not plant their roots and set a good foundation quickly. Like annuals, they require a lot of work. You know that you are going to be constantly recruiting to replace these as not many will return for the next season. Those that return found favorable conditions for growth and production.

One sales company taught a class called 2 & 1 as their starting class, as they felt that everyone had at least three sales in them regardless of whether they stayed or not. They nurtured these new plants to produce at least those three transactions and gave them the fertilizer and opportunity to develop deep roots. In spite of all of the work, the attrition rate was still over 50%. However, unlike many of their competitors, they benefited from the three transactions as it was ingrained and expected from point of hire. The owners of these companies found that by having a continuous recruiting program, these three transactions still had a strong likelihood of occurring and were not subject to seasonality that some of their perennial sales people were.

The perennial sales people could be counted on for good production but it was generally full of ups and downs. Worse yet, it seemed like all of the perennials were on the same blooming or production cycle. Like plants that are perennials, the sales people would put great effort in producing magnificent production three to four times per year. It was interesting that the cycles correlated to the time frame from opening a transaction to the point that it closed. If the producer bloomed and produced one to multiple transactions during the closing period no new blooms were produced, creating the cycle of production and what appeared to be seasonality. Like the blooming plants, the reward, recognition and appreciation systems were all tied to the opening and closing of business, not consistently managed production.

Trees and shrubs, whether deciduous or not, are a presence all year long and in general have a long life span as long as they can take root in the right environment. Each season, they present us with something special to admire. I have many trees and shrubs in my gardens, each planted and planned to ensure that no matter when they are in bloom, bud, sprouting a new leaf or always green, they have a place and a purpose.

All of these require work, many will need to be replaced over time and in some cases when the purpose of the landscape of garden requires more than pruning or adding more, uprooting, transplanting or change may be required.

I will always plant some annuals for seasonal color; have the perennials which show off during their blooming season and have the trees and shrubs which bring continuity. Managing and recruiting to production needs as if it were a garden where something is always in bloom will leverage talent, assets and reduce seasonality.

The War of the Roses

The roses have star power in my gardens. They bring visual delight and in some varieties even have a sweet fragrance. While they bloom in abundance over and over again from early spring until it is too cold usually late in the fourth quarter, they are also challenging, persnickety and demand attention. We do battle on a regular basis.



The War of the Roses

Some of the roses are fairly easy and deliver nicely like the Knockout variety. They still require water, deadheading and some treatments to keep the pests away but overall, they are pretty dependable. Those with the biggest and showiest bloom are a lot more work, they require advanced care that gets close to coddling but when they bloom, it all seems worthwhile. If you are successful in cultivating roses, they engage anything near in a turf war for dominance, sunshine and prominence.

I do get to earn my stripes – literally. Caring for these roses as they do attack (or so my husband says) with sharpened thorns ready to shred clothing or flesh that may get too close. Just try digging one out that has been there a while and you find that the root plant that the showy plant was grafted to is even meaner than what you usually see. Sometimes their “wild side even tries to become a bush with scraggly undesirable growth that given a chance will crowd out the performers and never give you a return on your investment.

Roses are in some ways a lot like producers and sometimes staff in some companies that I have observed. Just like the plants, the roses of your company or office seem to engage in skirmishes that untended become “the war of the roses”. Do you have any of these types in working for your company?

- The large flowered climbers are an interesting group. They are fairly hardy, look good at least once a year and them seem to have big blooms positioned on scraggly foliage. They never grow exactly the way you planned but their blooms are enough that you appreciate them when it happens and hope not to get scratched removing the dead head afterward. They are highly social and make friends with anything that might be nearby.
- Floribundas are great for working the periphery and helping to form a hedge against invaders but will take over any territory regardless of the rules or norms without control.
- The Hybrid Teas, with rare exception, would never survive on their own. They need a lot of help from you and everyone else. These are very showy and want to be noticed.
- The Old Garden Roses are a pretty happy bunch, steady in performance, hardy and just want to be left alone. Rarely the stars of the show but you can count on them for the long term.
- The miniature roses are great as a potted plant where they can be the center of attraction in a small space but don't survive well in most gardens. They are not tough enough and cower to all bullies. Often short lived with little impact.

- What does the name “Grandiflora” say to you? These are the prima donnas of the roses –often delivering in a large and showy manner but you are going to have to pay attention to them. These are not social and do not play well with others, they need a special spot. You will often want to recalculate the cost benefit.

There are roses in every company with many varieties represented. Just when you think you have everything under control, a minor infraction or neglect turns into the “War of the Roses” often between you and the roses or among all roses. Left unattended, the blooms of production diminish and none will thrive. When the roses are not doing well regardless of the reason, the pests invade using the situation to cause real damage.

As the owner or leader, you are constantly tending your company including the producing roses. It is not always an easy or pleasant task but the work does bring rewards. With the benefit comes the risk as every rose has its thorn.

The Underground

In every garden and company there is always a lot going on underground. No matter how much we have done to provide the right environment, there are natural and subversive elements ready to undermine our efforts.

We work hard to stimulate roots that are important for long term health and production by making sure that we provide the right growth medium and feed to fortify the new growth. We nurture by weeding and aerate sometimes even adding supporting staff – earthworms for the garden – coaches, trainers and managers in the company. Still there are forces at work, some we can work to control and others that are acts of nature.



The Underground

Floods and Droughts – Too much or too little of anything will present challenges. Floods and droughts are always driven by outside forces that we do not control. We are forced to deal with the effects. Since these tend to occur in cycles, we usually do not deal with both at once but may see a compounding effect. The damage is usually greatest underground. A great example of the flood and drought effect can be seen in the real estate business.

During the period from about 2001 through 2006 real estate sales hit high volume and revenue numbers outpacing norms significantly. Additionally the number of people selling real estate grew. Supply was up in every way possible and spending was abundant including an all-time rise in the percentage of commission paid to sales people. While most knew that the good times could not continue to roll at the pace achieved during those times, few were prepared for the bursting of the bubble and its effect. Sellers, many hamstrung and seriously under water from the pricing rise and fall found few buyers willing to buy due to prices and buyer confidence. Brokerage companies had long term contracts that could not be quickly modified to adjust to the reduced revenue stream including the crop of agents, many of whom had never really known lower commission splits. The flood perched business high and dry when the drought came.

At first people thought that the drought would be one or two years, few saw the long term coming or the impact that it would have to everything that in some way touched or was touched by real estate. The drought starved the businesses allowing the roots to become severely weakened especially in areas where the abundance and resulting rise was greatest. The strongest in the most favorable places and those that could adapt to the new realities quickest weathered the flood and the drought best.

Grubbs, Moles and Cutworms often attack gardens from underground but precautions and management give better control of the results. The grubbs are larvae waiting to hatch; in the meantime they wreak havoc on plants they feed on but also the predators that they bring to the garden – moles which feed on the grubbs and the beetles they become.

It is not unusual in any business population to have grubbs which silently munch on the roots of the business taking what they want and leaving a path of waste. They are often the discontents in a company and whether it was their plan or not, they feed information to moles. The moles are quite disruptive, digging into the company building feeding tubes right into the company. They use the grubbs and destroy everything in their wake.

If the grubs and the moles were not destructive enough underground the cutworms certainly make short work of the new and tender, cutting the roots from the plant and leaving behind a wilting stump that only when you look at the roots do you see the problem. The cutworms attacking companies may be long term, living within the company but making it very difficult for anyone new to get established. They may also be outsiders who plant doubt and suspicion as primary acts of subversion. The cutworms also bring in unwanted guests – stinging wasps and annoying flies who love to nest where decay is found.

The gardener knows that they have to prepare for the things that they cannot control and manage what they can. They have to look underground as the view of the surface never shows the extent of the problems until it is too late. The same is true for your business.

Critters

My gardens are full of “critters.” There are all kinds of critters which I kind of group by the number of legs. The birds with two legs and wings – some are helpful and others destructive pulling out new sprouts or eating all of the fruit the buds have brought. The four legged group of furry and reptilian, usually looking for a meal. The exception is my dog Anna, who usually is just curious or chasing something that she thought was interesting with a bad habit of digging if it is something that burrows. The group with six and eight legs includes predators that are not welcome as well as those that help get rid of the pests. The last group includes those with many legs like the millipedes and those without legs like the snakes.



Critters

All of these groups are a part of the ecosystem that exists in my gardens. Within that ecosystem, each has a purpose whether or not it aligns with mine. I marvel at all, even the ones I am not fond of. Companies also have critters exhibiting many characteristics some desirable and some not. Think about some of the people in your company and those you have met in business and I am sure that you will find the same type of critters in the ecosystem of business.

Within the birds, there is a large variety ranging from the colorful songbirds looking for seed, fast flying hummingbirds that prefer the nectar of anything red and the cackling crows that seem to delight in pulling out young sprouts, stealing dog food and seeming to taunt anyone they see. We also see a few geese who mistake our pool for a natural water source walking around with a defiant strut and willing to charge anyone who crosses their path. The raptors we see include wise hooting owls that hunt small prey and turkey vultures the caretakers of waste that would otherwise be detritus waiting to return to the earth.

There is a large variety in the four legged group as we are surrounded by woods with a creek on one side. These include the furry ones – deer that can strip a bush quickly; coyotes that tear things up a bit in the chase, cats and dogs that roam and the rodents. The rodent group includes the bunnies that are cute at first but have no problem harvesting a meal and digging holes. They are bait for larger predators, excepting one that we call Harvey due to his size. Other rodents range from the large like the raccoons and opossums to the smaller ones like chipmunks, voles, moles, squirrels, mice, and their larger cousins – rats dig, bury, and tunnel, some are far less welcome than others. The bats which are neither birds nor rodents with their winged arms and bit of creepiness are welcomed as they love to feast on annoying mosquitos.

Reptiles also make up a part of the four legged group from the small turtles that plod along looking for bugs and low vegetation. Frogs that catch all sorts of insects and the bull frogs that proudly announce their presence throughout the summer and small lizards that skim the surface, change colors and help manage the six legged population.

The six legged group often bring trouble from the cicadas with their rhythmic songs to every type of beetle, bee, wasp, mosquito, fly and more. Those that mind their business are left alone to do their work in the ecosystem. The butterflies and even some of the moths that present beautiful colors and float seemingly without purpose on gentle wisps of wind are admired for the beauty but leave a trail of damage as they feast on fresh vegetation and in evolution become the next generation of larvae chewing up roots and leaves until the next hatch occurs. The destructive ones present a constant battle.

Spiders spin exotic webs catching sunlight and flying prey. Watching their eight legs move in a synchronized dance as they approach what has been caught is always interesting.

I know that for the most part, snakes are good to have in a garden but there is something about their slithering presence and ways of seeming to always surprise me that is a bit unnerving and unwelcome. Most are actually docile, but some will rise up, stand their ground and make the motions of an attack over just about any disturbance. The smaller versions of worms, I can handle.

The caterpillars and millipedes are fascinating when you see them moving with the many legs and prolegs all moving in sync. The caterpillars are destined for flight but are usually pretty obnoxious with voracious eating habits that remind me of my kids as teenagers growing up. The millipedes are shy and simply try to hide from sight.

So many people I have met in companies come to mind when thinking of the characteristics of all of the critters that are in my gardens. Companies are an ecosystem too. No company is healthy if there is no diversity. The varieties of characteristics, motivators and even personalities allow companies to tackle opportunities, grow and thrive. There is always work to do in selection, control and management but in the end, give me the critters and I have all of the options to keep everything in bloom.

Failure to Thrive

Every gardener knows that there will be plants that just do not do well. In some cases, it is where they were planted, the soil mixture, light, shade, water and a host of other causes. There are cases where it was simply a poor specimen or bad seed. In all of these cases, there is a failure to thrive.



Failure to Thrive

In business, we see many examples of people who seem to have all of the right qualities and promised to be a good fit but never seemed to be able to succeed. Many of us will pour heart, soul and effort into these people with training, coaching, mentoring and even coddling. Frequently, we try to move them into new positions, place them on a different team and yes, if they are in sales, even feed them business in hopes that a taste of success will be just what they needed. We made the hiring decision and feel a great responsibility. It takes a while to develop a bit of a callus that allows us to, as one person put it, – “promote them to the next stage of their future” more efficiently.

Failure to thrive may occur at any level and in any role of a company. Let me tell you a few stories about people who just did not cut it.

Ben

Ben was the guy always in the center of the crowd in any room. He was a people magnet. You could hear his laughter, other people laughing with him and every conversation in which he was involved was highly animated. Everyone knew Ben and he greeted each warmly seeming to always remember their name and a tidbit of something meaningful to them. It appeared that he might be right for sales or maybe even leadership. He was hired into a sales role and asked to have some sort of a title that would set him a bit apart on his cards. Since titles are cheap to give and do not necessarily mean much – why not? A title was created. It was actually modest but might as well have been King, Emperor and Ruler from the strut that resulted. It set Ben apart from others and was a gentle feed to an ego that seemed so full of promise. Ben got busy letting everyone in his vast sphere of influence know about the new position and title.

First month went by and no deals were initiated but he was very busy. He had been in training for a good part of that time and setting up his “systems.” Second month, he promised that he had a lot on the cusp and deals would be on the board soon. Third month, still nothing, he said that he could really use some help on conversion – more training and some coaching. Each month, there was a new promise, a new excuse, a new initiative to make things work in hopes that the spark would become a flame. The title that had been given was also becoming a real pain among the producers who had never asked for a title.

One day, Ben came in and announced that he was going to another company. While there was some relief in not having to fire Ben, there were a number of feelings that invaded immediately. What had not been done? Why didn't this work as there had been so much promise. Would the next company reap the benefit from the investment that they had made? About a week later a different atmosphere was really noticeable in the company and spirit seemed to have returned. While Ben had always been at the center of a crowd, he was also the elephant in the room that sucked all of the air out of a room as if he was a vacuum. In reality, he was a black hole, devouring everything and returning nothing.

Marty

Marty was the son of the owner. Ever since the day he was born, he was the presumed successor to the family legacy. He was bright, personable and enjoyed being in and around the company. When it came time for him to go to college, he decided to pursue technical studies. The family encouraged this route as it promised to be an important part of the future of the company. Marty was a good student but not a passionate one. He graduated and immediately came into the company to take over the company's technology initiatives. It did not take long before he was fully nested in the role. He was always researching the best solutions, software, vendors and proposing things that the company could employ to meet its needs and give it a cutting edge position. He was great at spending money, getting people excited and enjoyed the fact that his knowledge of technology created a "uniqueness," a mystique and built a need for his work.

Discussions in the family and with Marty often turned to preparing him for the role of leading the company. He did not mind going to meetings, conventions and being in situations where his position as the heir apparent worked well but technology was his love and there was no true integration or path to acquire the skills and talents that would be needed.

People were hired that could complement his skills with the thought that the leader did not have to do it all but needed to manage the people who could take care of roles and responsibilities. He was neither the peer nor their boss. The more pressure that was put on him to take significant roles, the more deeply the technology requirements swallowed his efforts and interests. It was obvious that he was not interested in leading the company in spite of the opportunity and cultivation to take the lead.

Mary

Mary started off in the company like a house on fire. It seemed that everything she touched turned to gold. She was truly blooming where she had been planted. She was organized, very social and understood the business to a degree that she made few mistakes and required little assistance. She was the type of person that everyone wants to clone. Her first year was spectacular. The second year, it seemed like she just could not get started. She buried herself in details and busy work. Her production paled when compared to the previous year. First everyone kind of left her alone thinking that she would soon find her mojo. Then it was decided that some one-on-one coaching might be needed. Lots of other techniques were tried but the rocket was out of fuel. She was a one season bloomer who became a person that everyone kind of tiptoed around and whispered about. Some suggested that she just needed a rest so she was given her space. Mary's production was dribs and drabs. It was just enough to make minimum standards. She became one of those fixtures that doesn't seem to cause any harm so you keep them. The harm was that she was a wet blanket, weighing down energy and excitement.

There are many more examples of "failure to thrive" that are in different situations and roles. Companies that suffer the greatest from the impact of "failure to thrive" either do not have or do not use accountability and performance systems. A part of these systems begins in the hiring process with validations of experience and expertise. Once hired there is a training process that is specific to the career path that incorporates their strengths, leverages their talents and exposes them to growth opportunities. All processes and measurements have time lines with decision points. Putting processes in place does not remove the heart you invest but empowers the heart to make the right decisions for the good of the company, individuals and the team.

All companies and gardens will experience “failure to thrive”, hoping for growth and blooms where there is nothing happening. It can be costly and may define the company or garden by what shows to the public eye. Keeping everything in bloom, requires selection and tough decisions on when to pull an under or non-performer.

The Author and the Company

The author of the Everything's in Bloom series is Pat Soltys.



Pat Soltys has a long business and consulting history helping companies not only through tough times but more frequently in achieving their objectives. She understands the mechanics and structure of business as well as the challenges. Her writing aligns with a philosophy of content, communications and commerce. For more information see Pat's bio on our web site. <http://www.soltys-inc.com/psoltys.htm>. You may contact Pat directly at psoltys@soltys-inc.com

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