

## HORTICULTURAL EDUCATION — DOES IT FALL SHORT OF THE MARK?

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I can think of no more challenging or appropriate subject for debate and consideration at this particular time nor is there any group, with an even admixture of the teaching and research profession, the student body and the commercial practitioner, so uniquely qualified to explore the proposition.

As regards the student body, we face both a challenge and a crisis. The faculty members know far better than I that horticultural teaching institutions across the country are bursting at the seams with students. In our own state the horticultural enrollment at the University of Missouri has ballooned from 65 some 5 years ago to 330 at present. Our youngest panel member just 2 years out of college, has seen horticultural enrollment in his *alma mater* double and re-double since he matriculated. At Oregon State University, to pick a western institution, the 1970 horticultural enrollment was 60 students; the 1975 figure is 220. In almost every instance, I am told, the big jump has not been in such horticultural food fields as pomology or vegetable crops, but in ornamental or environmental horticulture. (I note our English friends use the more embracing term, "amenity horticulture.")

One of our panel members asked another, "What are you going to do with all these kids?" His reply was, "Well, at least we'll try to teach them to think." There surely is no more laudable goal, but that still leaves the institutions and industry with the problem and challenge of best utilizing this talent that will come pouring forth from the ivied halls.

At the outset I think all of us should understand the somewhat differing demands and requirements placed upon applicants as between institutional and governmental employment and commercial occupation. The former must, perforce, grant employment acceptance and compensation levels largely on academic skill and achievement. The commercial man basically doesn't give a hoot whether his employee has a fourth grade education or is a Ph.D. He employs people who he hopes can help him succeed in his enterprise. (As a practical matter, however, the handicap of education lack severely and obviously limits progress of most individuals in our increasingly technical and complex industry.)

There is a very thin line between netting 5% and losing 5% in a nursery enterprise, or any other business. Regularly netting 5% spells success; losing 5% for just a few years spells bankruptcy. If the student or instructor gets the notion that the commercial em-

ployer is sometimes ruthless, he may be right. Most businesses do not succeed. Studies by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Dun and Bradstreet, and others reveal about 1/3 of all new businesses do not survive their first year. At the end of 5 years less than a third of the starters survive. At the end of 7 years only one in five is still around. These drop-outs are not conspicuous simply because they do not exist. The venerable outfits so conspicuous and so well represented here are the ones that have gone through the decimating fires of those early years and who have learned to cope. Nor is company age any guarantee of continued success. Each year is a new challenge and a new trial. My remarks should in no way be interpreted as denigrating scholastic achievement.

We commercial operators have perhaps rightly been accused of choosing the lowest common denominator in hiring help, particularly those guys who do the labor. As with nurserymen across the country, I have experienced disappointment as well as tremendous satisfaction in recruiting college-trained people. Our nursery, Forrest Keeling, is a medium-sized business. We have in our employ 9 college graduates, mostly in horticulture or related science, and some others with a couple of years or so of college education. These are the people who manage, supervise, sell and perform technical functions. It isn't that we love them any better than others; it just so happens that they have what it takes to do the work to be done.

Just the other day I read in *Nation's Business* the inspiring story of how Edward Donnell came into a very sick Montgomery Ward Co. in 1962 and turned it around to become a thriving, healthy, prospering major U.S. corporation. Mr. Donnell was asked, "What do you believe is the No. 1 ingredient of good management?" He replied, "The ability to select talented people has to be No. 1."

To the extent our profession and industry can train, select and guide these young people entering our ranks, to that extent will our profession and industry thrive, serving the growing and many-faceted horticultural needs of our nation.