

Lessons Learned: My 43 Year Journey with Commercial Micropropagation

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Summary

Gayle Suttle the long-time CEO of Microplant Nurseries, Inc., provides insights into

running a successful micropropagation business learned over four decades.

INTRODUCTION

Microplant Nurseries, Inc., is one of the largest and longest running commercial plant micropropagation facilities in the world. Gayle provided a history of Microplant and also told some stories of what it was like walking into the project 43 years ago. She then shared some of the most important lessons she has learned along the way. Here is a summary:

- 1) You learn most from your mistakes.** So ... give yourself a break! Don't waste time beating yourself or others up about it. Figure out what went wrong, fix it the best you can, set safeguards in place so you don't repeat the mistake, and then move on.
- 2) Simplify the process.** Make it easier to do things right and harder to do things wrong.

3) It is easy to build a lab, but very hard to make one work.

4) Know where you are going ... and ... believe you will get there. This means you should know what the goal is. Declare where you are going! Know what you want! Keep your eyes on the prize.

5) It's not a success unless it is repeatable. Document the process so you know what you did.

6) Calculators are fabulous toys. The author uses a horseshoeing story to illustrate the power of exponential growth, calculating the value of each of 32 nails doubled every time. The first nail is worth one penny. The last one is worth over \$21million. It looks so easy, but EVERYTHING must be doubled, and EVERYTHING must go as planned.

7) Under-promise and over-deliver. Customers rely on their orders to arrive on time and to be filled in full. When planning, fudge factors are our friends. Work backwards on the calendar, set benchmarks to keep on track and have the grace to renegotiate the delivery with your customers if things aren't on track. Let them decide if they want to take the crop late or take less. But really, plan to use so many fudges that you hit the goal right on time, maybe even early! The most important thing of all in developing a business is to recognize that whatever you do, whatever you produce, whatever you are selling MUST be what the customer wants!

8) Be relentless in the pursuit of excellence. Robert Townsend, in his great book 'Up the Organization' said "If you don't do it excellently, don't do it at all. Because if it's not excellent, it won't be profitable or

fun, and if you are not in business for fun or profit, what the hell are you doing there?

9) Clean plants are easier to manage. Plants are not sterile. Build defenses against bad guys, make it inhospitable for them. Also, build early detection systems. Be relentless about it.

10) Plan on growing. This means – plants, space and people.

11) Document the process. Everything. Hard copy and digitally. This will help you do things right and avoid repeating past mistakes. Use technology, build books and use them to teach and remember. Update regularly. It is exhausting but be relentless about it. Computers are terrific.

12) Share the wealth. Knowledge, ideas, triumphs, challenges, fun, dollars and promote from within.

13) Look around. Get out there! Be curious! Make friends ... you need them.

14) Enjoy the journey. Have fun with – fellow employees, customers, compatriots and competitors. All are friends and life is short.

15) Books on my reading list include:

The Goal by Eliyahu M. Goldratt

Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Steven R. Covey

Up the Organization: How to Stop the Corporation from Stifling People and Strangling Profits by Robert Townsend

Who Moved My Cheese by Spencer Johnson, M.D.