

Lifelong learners: guilt by association[©]

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Once the reality of graduation sets in and we realize that we must spread our wings and go out into the “Real” world—not the one of a college student—but that of a wage earner and responsible adult—we often get the misimpression that we know something—after all we did graduate!

Perhaps we should look at a diploma as a license to learn and not the end of a process. A good university and professor will inspire and give us the basic knowledge to perform in our field without embarrassing ourselves or the institution—too badly. Often times we believe that we have “finished” - completed the task and graduated.

Once we are among peers and hopefully begin using our education—we should quickly realize that there are many ways of doing things. Some better and some not, some smarter and some not. But if we are observant—we appreciate what we learned at a good university was a great base with which to explore and move forward without making too many silly mistakes.

In horticulture we should have a basic understanding about plant physiology, how and why plants grow, what is a good soil or soil mix, how much water a plant requires and why it burns when over fertilized. We should recognize how much actual nitrogen is in a formulation and understand the potential for burning, based on the nitrogen formulation and concentration.

What we may initially lack is the knowledge of what makes a particular technique better than another or how to successfully grow 9,000 cell cultures through the first 6 months of life. This is where our boots on the ground, continuing education comes into play; continued because our degree was simply a foundation and license to learn. But there is so much more to learn after we graduated—that we did not realize—we have yet to arrive. This continuing education will take the form of reading trade magazines and going to educational programs at the IPPS, Texas Nursery and Landscape Association (TNLA) and other associations. It is critical that one’s educational process include associating with others that have been successful in the business. Often a peer or mentor can cut so quickly to the chase that you will think you have been “sprayed with IBA”. I hope everyone got an opportunity to take advantage of the tours that are offered with this conference. Furthermore I hope you took advantage of the once in a lifetime opportunity to ask questions on technique or why something is done one way or another. No one person or company has all the answers—but most of the time they figure out what works well for them in their unique situation.

Take advantage of the opportunity to serve your profession by serving on the associations’ committees or Board of Directors. In so doing you will be offered the opportunity to meet and associate with some of the most experienced and innovative folks in this industry. Learn from them, share with them—because you never know when you might want to reach out and ask for their help. Your stable of associates may well be your most valuable resource!

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