

In size it measures roughly one acre and is almost square in shape. The section allocated to me is one of four adjacent walled-in plots of land which have recently been acquired by the nursery. Already we are making good use of this extra space and have planted out various shrubs numbering from 50 of certain cultivars down to as few as three of others.

This area should prove itself to be useful for testing plants of species which are unable to survive in the sheltered conditions provided by the walled in area and are not worth the risk of growing. Two of the main genera in question here at the moment are *Cistus* and *Ceanothus*, both eminently saleable plants but of questionable hardiness.

The other plus factor of this new area, is that we are now able to compare new species and cultivars side by side and to judge their worthiness for our use.

CHANGE ON THE NURSERY

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If our I.P.P S. Conference has been of value at all, there will be some changes on the nursery as a result of our attendance. These changes need careful study to be effective, and so we will look at possible changes under five headings.

(1) In what area of business should there be changes? Changes in the wrong area could precede disaster. One guideline is, "the area where we do worst." Here, change can only improve things — or so it may seem. Another guide is, "where we are doing very well" — change in this area could shift us from the mediocre nursery to the elite nursery.

Suggestions are.

Outlets. Selling wholesale, to garden centres, instead of retail to the visiting public, — or vice-versa.

Subjects involved, or type of plant produced. Perhaps growing standards of choice ornamental trees instead of maiden fruit trees. A bigger change could be in going from bare-root to container sales. .

Sources of Stock. Beginning a stock-plant area, so that all the cutting material is completely under your own control, instead of depending on local nurseries or gardens. An addi-

tional facet here could be the use of a stock bed some distance from the nursery.

Actual Spread of Activities. Increasing the length of time the crop is held, e.g. propagation being cut out, in favour of importing of pot-liners. Increasing sales to include sundries as well as plants. Alternatively, selling at liner stage instead of 2-year-old plants.

Logistics of the Nursery. Replacing the frame yard with standing out ground, and so widening paths to take motorised trucks instead of wheel-barrows. Altering the position of the main entrance to the nursery and thus realising space for an improved loading bay.

Overall Expansion. Purchase or renting more land. Rebuilding packing-shed/work-shed, and tractor shed with a larger composite facility, to include office, parking, tool store, and messroom.

Staffing. Encouraging younger staff to take on more responsibility by

- a) being less involved oneself;
- b) allocating specific projects of development to individuals, and giving them the responsibility to pursue this;
- c) discussing all policy with them;
- d) introducing a skilled foreman to take on a section of the nursery.

Communications.

a) Perhaps it is a typist we need? What about the cost of her typewriter? Does she understand what the firm is there for? Will she have to be the "office-manager" — as well as the typist?

b) Perhaps we need a computer? — for records of stock, sales, costings?

c) What about Prestel — the FARMLINK of Agriculture? Who knows how many fruit tree maidens are available next year in the U.K. How can we find out how to grow this new crop — can Prestel help? Are we prepared in our public relations to get into the computer age? Can our customers get us when they want to us? What about the cheapest source of peat, sand, fertiliser, pots, timber. What is the current price of rootstocks? Am I able to buy or sell all I need to at the correct prices?

(2) Why should there be change?

To bring in more revenue. This could be the most frequent reason for changes; it may not be the most important! It needs careful calculation to be the correct reason!

Does the cost of the change measure up to the suggested magnitude of the increase in revenue. (If not, why change?)

To increase the enthusiasm among the staff. Apathy is very expensive! To increase enthusiasm could have a large knock-on effect. Perhaps this is not thought of frequently enough by owner/managers, — and our staff are working at half-throttle because of boredom! — while we wear ourselves to a frazzle to squeeze work out of them!

To make life easier for the owner/manager. At first sight this could be a dangerous reason for change, but if father spends 90 hours a week at work, it is justifiable, — no man is an island — the family need him, — and he needs the family if he is to be the well rounded person he ought to be.

If life becomes a bit easier for the manager, he may be able to see things on the nursery in perspective — may be able to “stand back and look” — and so become a better manager.

Perhaps, taking a reduction in his weekly hours could lead him to greater contact with other nurserymen.

In fact, if he could ever go on holiday (!!!) he could well learn something of profit from nurserymen elsewhere in the world! “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.”

To satisfy the challenge of new developments. Given the energy, this can be worthwhile — when we cross one hurdle, is it not just to see another hurdle in front of us? — and so on and so on — taking the firm with us! But we need to see it for what it is — changing to answer the challenge of new developments.

To boost ones own ego. To “make one’s name a household word” may be the result of the production of the worthwhile plants — but to make it one’s reason for changing things on the nursery could jeopardise the quality in some cases — many firms have crashed on this bridge.

To keep up with ones contemporaries. Although, perhaps, we would not admit to this being a reason for alterations on the nursery, a careful examination of our motives — (or of our reactions when we hear of our neighbour’s latest activities) could be revealing. It may not be worthwhile.

Each change contemplated could be associated with a different reason, in our own minds.

We need to recognize the motives in our changes on the nursery. As we analyse our motives in honesty, we may be unpleasantly surprised!

Perhaps determination to progress can be motivated by personal competition — or even revenge!

To recognize the motive in our desire to introduce changes on the nursery may increase the urgency of these changes — or in fact remove the desire to change at all!

The Greek philosophical cry of, “know thyself,” is very important!

(3) How much change should be introduced? This is dependent on several distinct factors — all of which must be looked at to see if the changes contemplated are affected by these factors.

Size of nursery. If at the moment it is only just “making ends meet”, the changes need to be fairly certain of success. If potentially the nursery is very adequate, we can afford to speculate a little more.

Financial health of the nursery.

a) *Investment:* Have we all our eggs in one basket?

b) *Loan repayment.* Have we a lot of borrowed capital? This limits change a bit.

c) *Capital available:* If no capital can be found, then all costs of change may have to be paid back over years. Careful accounting is vital here.

Personality of staff

a) Are they easy-going? Are they happy to “have a go at something new, Guv.”

b) Will the changes made make life more pleasant for them, so far as working with the rest of the staff is concerned?

c) Are they happy to listen, to try to understand, and perhaps work harder or longer temporarily, to facilitate the change?

Expertise among staff. Are the staff mainly “career” people — working to learn more and to progress in the nursery stock industry, or are they mainly “pin-money” folks? Does the nimbleness of their fingers justify asking them to be less detailed workers on a heavier job? — or vice versa? Does Johnny have the skill with a knife which will enable him to progress from cuttings to whip and tongue grafting?

Age of staff affected by change. If 50% of the workers are in their last 5 years of working life, we would need to consider carefully any change which would involve continued heavy lifts, which had not been their work in the last 20 years! — or which would “put them down” in the eyes of the other workers.

Colour of hair of the owner/manager

If GREY/WHITE, — and occupied with spoiling the grand-

children, it is usually more difficult to find the energy and ability for a lot of change! Many well laid plans go awry because this is not taken into account.

If *RED/BLACK* — and under 40 years old with a propensity to “sail near the wind” for prolonged periods, to be involved in “risky living” — then perhaps a greater amount of change can be undertaken and successfully managed.

Also, the momentum necessary to keep going through the crises brought about by the changes is more likely to be sustained if the owner/manager was born since the end of World War II.

Perhaps the rough rule of thumb of the 1960s could be considered here. This was to say that “no change should be implemented in any one year or season which constitutes more than about 15% of the nursery’s activity, staffing or turnover.” Some firms might still be in existence today had they followed some such rule of thumb!

Conversely, those red-headed among us would say that those nursery catastrophes could have been avoided had more change been made — and earlier!

The whole thing needs to be looked at and carefully considered by the person contemplating the changes.

(4) When should the changes be implemented?

Now — this week, month, season, year. “Striking when the iron is hot.”

Many bargains are seen only after the opportunity has passed, — and the winner is the one who acted quickly. No good regretting things after the moment of opportunity has passed. Much depends on our interpretation of the current trends — if this change is possible now, but obviously will not be possible next year or ever again, then this is a strong point.

After thinking carefully. To think carefully — and then to introduce some far-reaching change builds confidence — and so does careful thinking which leads to a decision not to go ahead. Rushed decisions sometimes lead to regrets. If the changes affect others, then we shall (rightly) be blamed.

After consulting the experts in the particular field. Other folks’ experience is cheaper than ours! Whether they are mistakes or successes, large or small decisions — if someone knows something, let us learn it — rather than learn by our own costly mistakes.

Experts are found everywhere — Accountants, Bank Managers, ADAS, IPPS, Colleges, Horticultural Trade Associations, our experienced friends — folks who have travelled the world

— let us consult them, and pick their brains before jumping in too far!

After discussing with one's personal mentor. Each of us has a respected senior friend to whom we look for guidance — for advice. Let us take him the proposed change, especially if it is a major change. Let us “bounce off him” so we can hear our own thoughts, and get his reactions to them — and with one's wife.

A wife is a “helpmeet” — who can often bring a different perspective to things if we let her. She know us, knows our strengths and weaknesses, and may well see benefits and/or problems unrecognized by us. If she is with us — in the changing practices, she will support us — so we need to discuss things with our life-partner, and with the staff.

Some changes will affect *all* the staff, — some will affect some of them — but it is a good thing to keep all the staff informed about changes we propose. They may have ideas which will enhance the changes and we will obtain their cooperation.

After praying about it. Perhaps in 1984 that sounds old fashioned — and certainly there are fewer horticultural books published today with a verse of scripture as the heading of the preface or the chapter.

Perhaps the fashion should be disregarded! Many growers can testify to the value of prayer in their business and in their life. If our prayer is to ask God, our heavenly Father, for His guidance, the changes we make (or do not make) could be the right ones. After all, He can see into the future — we cannot! James, one of the writers of the New Testament, said “If any of you lack wisdom . . . ask of God, who gives to all men liberally . . .” Turning to God in prayer could well mean a revolution in your business!

(5) For how long should the changes be tried?

The length of time we “put the new system on trial” will differ according to the kind of change we envisage.

If it is in the realm of marketing — then 2 or 3 years could well be the minimum trial period we should envisage. If new lines are introduced the same would apply. If it is a new potting system, then one sizeable crop may adequately tell us what we need to know. If a lengthening or shortening of the cropping is planned, then 3 or 4 crops must go through the system before we throw it out.

One important factor is this. All the staff habits and expertise must be fully adapted to the new system before we can say whether it is a worthwhile change or not. More good ideas

have been lost by too short a trial than by too long a trial. Remember, it will be really impossible to reintroduce an idea after an unsuccessful *short run*.

Finally, *there is a price to pay for changing things*. This price may be in:

Cash if it is new equipment — a tractor, computer, prestel unit.

Interest on loans. If it is expansion in land, stock, labour, equipment

Space. For buildings, cropping, standing out ground.

Time. May be management time, or operational time.

Information. If we are to obtain and make use of extra information, we will have to give information too. If Prestel and Farmlink are to be useful to the nursery stock listing, we must put something into it. This surely is the motto of the I.P.P.S. — “To Seek and To Share.”

There are some costs we must not incur! Among them are:

Relationships, among staff, between ourselves and our customers, among the family, and in the home.

Peace of mind. If the cost is an uneasy conscience or a load of worry, then it is not on.