

When 'Wrong' Works Well

Henry's Farm & Greenhouses in Pennsylvania has found success in growing and making special, different things in a special and different place.

By Anna Mary Barcus

Whenever I talk about our business, whether it's with other folks in the industry or customers, the most common reaction I get is disbelief. How do we get away with what we're doing? To be honest with you, I'm not sure that I entirely understand it myself.

Henry's Farm & Greenhouses is a family business where, in spite of doing things "wrong," we have developed a cult following of customers who seek quality and the unique above all else.

Through the years we have remained true to ourselves, and what could be seen as limiting factors are actually some of our greatest assets.

A little history for you — my mother founded this business in 1990, determined to pursue her passion for growing plants while raising her girls at home on the family farm. Today in our retail greenhouse there are framed pictures of my sisters and I as toddlers, "helping" at the potting bench and even my youngest sister napping in the baby swing surrounded by trays of pansies. It is absolutely amazing to me to see how that one little hoop house was just the start of the life and business we have today.

We have evolved into three divisions: wholesale, custom growing and retail sales. My role has certainly changed over the years and now I lead a multi-generational team of women in our retail division. We grow and sell high-quality plants with an emphasis on the unique and strive to be an inspiring destination for our customers.

A Unique Position

The Henry farm is located in rural Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, which is an absolute paradise for plant lovers! The area is flush with garden centers, greenhouses, nurseries, plant auctions and roadside plant stands. And here we are in the middle of it, doing things all wrong, and thriving.

Just writing out our retail hours makes me realize how ludicrous they sound! By choice, we are open only for seasonal retail sales with limited hours. More specifically, the greenhouse opens up for under five weeks in the spring and just about three weeks for Christmas. During those seasons the greenhouse is open for only two and a half days a week, plus an evening event or two. That's it.

But listen — as foolish as that seems, especially in a sea of garden retail options, it's working. It allows us the freedom to be creative perfectionists and to have a semblance of life beyond the greenhouse.

And as it turns out, there are things more important to our customers than just convenience. We have cultivated a loyal customer base who value our quality offerings and unique flare so much so that they will play by our rules. In return, we make every visit well worth their while.

The basics are covered, of course: the greenhouse is spotless and stocked with watered plants and hanging baskets (no watering while customers are trying to shop!), and the merchandising and displays are always refreshed.



Fresh Perspectives

Then we take it up a notch by designating members of our team to be available exclusively to customers by offering advice, education and encouragement. What these women lack in formal horticultural training is made up for in hands-on experience in the greenhouse and at their own homes. In fact, many of them assist with spring planting. This works well for all of us as there's a little extra diversity built in to the job description and their production knowledge is a bonus on a retail level.

But what truly sets us apart is hard to put into words. My mom and I talk about it often, trying to define what exactly is our draw. Why do our customers seek us out, year after year, even driving from out of state and beyond past who knows how many other greenhouse businesses? Yes, we have great plants ... but truth be told, lots of places do. Our in-store customer service is exceptional, but we don't have a phone number to call. The farm is a beautiful but rural locale, which is both a blessing and a curse.

The best we can come up with is this: we're real. Like, really real. We are the Henry family, we love our greenhouses, and that passion is apparent in all that we do.

The Key of Authenticity

On a superficial level, I know that the look we have cultivated plays a large role in our success. We are not chasing trends that don't fit our style and we avoid slick promotional material. Instead, we have opted to focus on honing our very own artsy farmer aesthetic and creating a space where people can be inspired. Heck, we want to create a space where WE can be inspired!

I'll take a refreshing, unique space over a sterile, cookie-cutter store every time. Henrys' is the real deal. Whenever we are able, we'll choose real over reproduction. Our own imagination over secondhand internet inspiration. One-of-a-kind over mass production.

Is it more work? Yes. Does it bring our customers back time and again? Oh my yes! Our quest for the unique is practically a compulsion at this point and our people know that every time they come there will be something new for them to see and buy.



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Fresh Perspectives

But at the core of what we have crafted here is our heart and soul. At the risk of sounding super cheesy, I'll continue. Our people (and likely your people too!) are seeking authenticity. Originality. They can sense it here. We are genuine in our love of what we do and that love pours over into everything that goes on here.

When your motivation is pure it is so easy to go above and beyond expectations on the regular. You try new and weird things; you're vulnerable and excited. And it's contagious!

Our whole team feeds off of each other creatively, influencing and encouraging each other. We give them the space to develop their creativity. Sure, some creative skill is innate but, like anything else, it can be developed with willingness and practice.

I take great pride in knowing that the same members of our team who can run the registers can throw together a beautiful planter with ease! This dynamic energy does not hide well. Our customers sense it and they keep coming back for more.

It's a wonderful challenge to be constantly creating! And that right there may be our hallmark: that we grow and make special, different things in a special and different place. If you're in the market for the unique, beautiful and original, I can guarantee you'll find it here.

This may be obvious, but I feel compelled to point it out. Do you really want your defining feature to be your prices? To anyone else, is your store interchangeable with another down the road? When you are offering your customers a totally different, high-quality product and shopping experience they will recognize it and seek you out.

Make your product your selling point, not your price. Excellence and originality are appealing to all demographics.

Speaking of excellence, while the creative aspect is arguably more glamorous than growing, I doubt any long-term customer would forgo plant selection or quality in favor of lovely visuals or interesting ideas. Yes, much of gardening these days can be considered "decorating," with customers choosing plants based solely on color schemes. But we are doing a disservice to all if we prioritize style over substance. Even those who simply want to decorate want the tools to find long-term success.



We are picky about the plant material we choose to grow and sell. In the off season we put in the work by visiting trials, reading up on interesting new selections and gardening on a personal level.

With their knowledge, experience and artistic eye, our team is able to educate and empower our customers to made successful decisions.

As we approach another spring season, I would encourage you to see with new eyes and an open mind. Find fresh inspiration. Allow yourself and those around you to exercise creativity. Focus where your passion lies. I'm certain that you (and your customers!) will be amazed. 🌿

Anna Mary Barcus is retail manager at Henrys' Farm & Greenhouses in Holtswood, Pennsylvania, and a member of GPN's 40 Under 40 Class of 2018. She can be reached at henrysgreenhouses@gmail.com.



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