

GOAL STACKING

Partner with your customers to meet their garden goals by using relational sales and goal stacking.



By Christina Salwitz

Let's just put it out there: we are NOT going to get to ALL of those New Year's goals, no matter how much you grind it out day after day; we're all just trying to do too much. Let me introduce you to the concept of "Habit or Goal Stacking." And though it might be a handy thing for you personally, I think it has all the potential to be a wickedly accurate way to sell more, too.

We set all kinds of personal and professional goals for our business about improvements in service, marketing or sales, but do we actively express what potential garden goals we may want for our customers? In other words, are we as a group of garden centers, nurseries, designers and growers showing our customers options for goals they might not even know to think of yet?

Setting Goals

I always associate the early months of the year with a few things in the garden center — the first shipments of bare root plants that need to be potted, the first flats of early spring bulbs starting to sprout, fragrant primroses and a few early timid customers who want to talk about houseplants that struggled over winter and what to do next. But it occurs to me that I don't ever recall hearing, reading or seeing first-hand any garden centers promoting HOW customers can actively meet their garden goals step by step.

The exact same customer who made the goal to lose weight in 2020 is no different than the customer who looks at this garden and says to themselves, "Yup, that's my goal for 2020. I want to be sitting in the garden with a glass of wine and admiring its floriferous abundance, on a low budget and maintenance free." In the zeal and enthusiasm we have for our new goal, we tend to forget that gorgeous landscapes are not made in a day, much to the shock and horror of today's HGTV fans!

It's about introducing small goals and habits that stack and add up over time to big life-changing accomplishments, right? Let's use our vibrant and intrepid early spring customers as a great example of how you can adapt this idea to create more and better-quality sales.

Two Kinds of Sales

As I see it, there are pretty much two kinds of sales: 1) Short-term lust, instant gratification, "gotta have it, no idea where to put it or what to do with it but I'm in love and don't care," or "I buy these XYZ plants and products every year at this time" and 2) The customer who's a bit more experienced. The "been there, killed that" type who understand paying for quality likely means better success, making educated decisions with the help of talented garden center salespeople, who tend to look at the bigger picture when they purchase.

Goal Stacking to Increase Sales

So, that leads me to think that if you can meld the two sales groups by using Goal Stacking, you might really have

a sales funnel that you can adapt and interpret a zillion and one ways, with a multitude of products, classes, and events season after season.

Best-selling author James Clear writes: "Habit stacking is a special form of an implementation intention. Rather than pairing your new habit with a particular time and location, you pair it with a current habit."

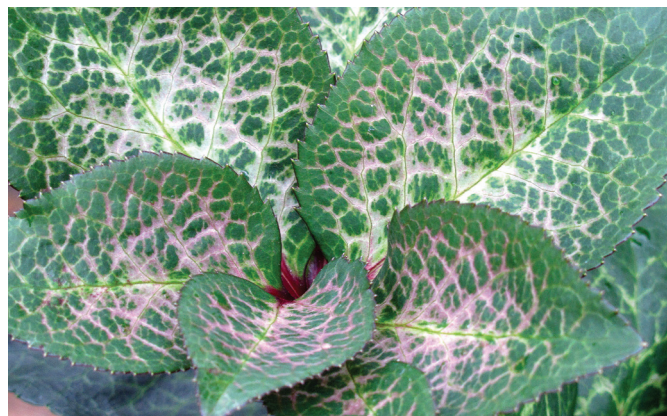
Through the practice of habit stacking, we become aware of the habits that are already integrated into our lives and use them as foundations on which to build other beneficial habits toward our goals and best outcomes. So, why don't we sell plants, products and events as though we are helping our customers achieve their new goals or habits rather than just throwing seasonal noodles at the walls and hoping they'll stick?

Let's break it down:

Helping a customer from Sales Type No. 1

"Those fragrant primroses and tete-a-tete daffodils are going to be perfect together! Did you know they might come back next year in the garden? As soon as it warms up, they will want to go dormant, so having a plan to hide them as they finish their spring show is something to think about now.

"Have you ever grown hellebores? They have gorgeous leathery tough foliage; they're long blooming and the



foliage remains after they're done blooming to cover up the plants going dormant. This is a plant that you might want to consider collecting to build up an epic winter show for years to come."

This customer is in the habit of coming in every year for the early bulbs and primroses and then, as they die back, gets frustrated at them looking ratty and tosses them without a thought because there will soon be new things to get excited about in the garden.

This is a great fast and easy sale, year after year. But encouraging a new goal of becoming a hellebore collector might never have occurred to them. We just stacked a new



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idea and a new goal for a better-quality sale — and if your hellebore selection sells out fast, you might even build in some urgency, too. I've seen fistfights break out over hellebores in garden centers when selection gets low on certain fancy cultivars like 'Penny's Pink'!

Helping a customer from Sales Type No. 2

"Welcome back, Kathy! Did you see the hellebores are all in now? I set aside a few of the newer ones for you today to look at before they sell out. Last year, I recall you mentioning that you had paired them with some amazing ferns, early bulbs and astilbe; how did that work out? It was a bit hot for them in that spot, you say? In our bare root shrub section, we just got the most amazing 'Lemony Lace' ninebarks that will offer just a bit of shade in that spot for the other plants. Follow me and I'll show you!"

Kathy was already accustomed to spending money on collecting hellebores and other perennials for her early spring garden, but the larger "furniture" pieces of her design weren't in place yet to protect her investment. Here, we've not only reaffirmed with Kathy that her choices are great, but that we're in it with her and her goals are being tended to by a team that's on her side.

Functionally, it might look something like this:

Customer, Year One: Buys the "grab-and-go" little box of a few primroses, violas and early bulbs about to bloom, but learns about "fancy" primroses that are reliable perennials too.

Customer, Year Two: Buys the "grab-and-go" little box of a few primroses, except this time they're fancy quart-sized

cultivars, violas and early bulbs about to bloom. They're also adding an adorable fern and a little groundcover to pair with them.

Customer, Year Three: Buys the same "grab-and-go" little box of a few fancy primroses, violas and early bulbs about to bloom, but now not only are they adding an adorable fern and a little groundcover, but also a lovely heuchera that is the perfect color echo to the hellebore.

You can actively participate and promote this idea through posters, email, classes and events throughout the year, whether your customer is buying veggie starts, ornamentals, seeds or even tools and hardgoods. The concept of partnering with your customers to meet their garden goals by using relational sales and goal stacking is smart business. 🌸

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