

I DARE YOU

Did you watch Sesame Street when you were little? I did. Loved it. Remember that game where you were presented with several objects, and you were supposed to identify the member of the group that was different while a catchy little tune was playing in the background... "One of these things is not like the others. One of these things does not belong..." Let's play that game now.

Plants Unlimited, Rockport, Maine; Laughton's Garden Center, N. Chelmsford, Mass.; Saint Aubin Nursery, N. Eastham, Mass.; Schafer Nursery, Bellingham, Mass.; Vinney's Garden Center, E. Hartford, Conn.; Vinney's Garden Center, Wallingford, Conn.; and you. Now which one doesn't belong?

You! You don't belong — at least you're not part of the group that ties these garden centers together. They are all enrolled in *Lawn & Garden Retailer's* Training Challenge, but you're not. Why is that? Don't you think training is important? Don't you want to have the most knowledgeable employees possible? Don't you want to increase sales? Aren't you as dedicated as your peers? And yes, this is peer pressure in its purest form — bear with me; it's for a good cause.

THE CHALLENGE

In a nutshell, the Training Challenge is a 52-week program created, presented and managed by JP Horizons, a well-known training and motivation company, that offers a package of training materials, personal assistance and several in-house sessions per year, all geared toward changing your perception about training.

The program asks garden centers to commit to holding a 30-minute training session each week for 52 weeks. It asks that you make these sessions interactive, quirky and generally interesting and gives you assistance in doing so. It also asks that you hold these sessions every week no matter what else is going on, no matter how little time you have, no matter how much resistance you get.

The return? More than you know. JP Horizons is in the third year of a challenge with the landscape industry, and many of the founding companies are still participating. Morale has improved, safety has improved, work quality has improved, employee retention has improved...I could go on,

but I suspect that you already see a trend here. The same kinds of things can happen in your garden center. And I know that I don't have to tell you that service and knowledge are what will set your garden center apart from the big boxes!

If you're curious about the Training Challenge, there's more information about it on page 55. You can also look for a monthly column in *Lawn & Garden Retailer* that will follow the progress of the participants and will share the Challenge's best ideas with those of you who are still not convinced enough to join.

This a great program that *Lawn & Garden Retailer*, along with title sponsor Proven Winners, is glad to be part of. After just a couple of sessions, you'll see that the dividends are well worth the investment. So go ahead and join...I dare you!



Bridget White, Editor
(847) 391-1004
bwhite@sgcmail.com

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The latest poinsettia offerings and how to profit from them

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What independents are doing to combat chain store competition

Management:

Developing and conducting customer surveys

Merchandising:

Part II of Judy Sharpton's retail case study series

Plus...

- Water gardening plant possibilities
- New Christmas products
- Improving your book department

Bridget C. White

LAWN & GARDEN

Retailer

STAFF

E.S. Gillette	Group Publisher egillette@sgcmail.com
Tim Campbell	Publisher tcampbell@sgcmail.com
Bridget White	Editor bwhite@sgcmail.com
Carrie Burns	Associate Editor cburns@sgcmail.com
Kelley Murphy	Associate Editor kmurphy@sgcmail.com
Brandi Thomas	Associate Editor bthomas@sgcmail.com
Elizabeth Pensgard	Editorial Assistant
Felix Schilling	Account Manager (817) 731-9352 • felixschilling@sbcglobal.net
Tami Morrell	Integrated Accounts Manager tmorrell@sgcmail.com
Jean Till	Integrated Accounts Manager jtill@sgcmail.com
Judith H. Schmueser	Director of Production Operations jschmueser@sgcmail.com
Linda L. Lambdin, C.C.P.	Director of Circulation llambdin@sgcmail.com
Erica Rivera	Advertising Coordinator erivera@sgcmail.com
Jody Cardinal	Director of Corporate Communications jcardinal@sgcmail.com
Judy Ann Paul	Sales & Marketing Associate jpaul@sgcmail.com
Donna Aly	Classified Advertising daly@sgcmail.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Carolyn Allen
Stan Pohmer
Judy Sharpton
Mitch Whitten

Editorial Office: (847) 391-1004
Sales Office: (817) 731-9352

CORPORATE

H.S. Gillette Chairman/CEO
Sheldon Schultz President
E.S. Gillette Vice President Sales
K.S. Gillette Secretary

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