



# No Pain, All Gain Training

By Pete Bottomley

**H**ave you ever seen the ad for the U.S. Army that goes something like this — “Pain is just weakness trying to escape your body”? Or how about this familiar, old slogan seen in countless locker and weight rooms: “No Pain, No Gain.” This is about as compelling as “More Work, Less Money”! It’s no wonder people associate training with pain and that people often do their best to avoid training.

In order for your training program to be successful in making team improvements or changing individual behaviors, there needs to be consistent application and practice of new skills and ideas. Okay, I know I’m already making it sound painful. You’re already thinking “no pain, no gain,” right? We’ve all heard that slogan thousands of times; over the years of constant repetition and exposure, this negative affirmation has become ingrained in our minds.

We all feel that if we want to improve, it’s going to hurt.

## TRAINING — A NEW PERSPECTIVE

It doesn’t have to be this way; in fact, this is actually the total opposite of how highly effective training works. If it’s fun, enjoyable, pleasurable and rewarding, the gains seem to come with little effort. This idea was reinforced in my mind again this January at the 2003 JP Horizons Sales Jam in Miami, where guest speaker, author and fitness guru Larry North shared his life philosophy with the attendees. He showed us that the most effective physical training for the body doesn’t press the limits of our pain threshold. The best physical training is totally enjoyable, and by being enjoyable, produces better results over the long run because you will stick to it.

How does this philosophy apply to training our retail teams to increase knowledge, confidence and performance? Many garden centers don’t train enough, or at all, because they feel they don’t have time, they think it will cost too much, or they just don’t know how to do it. Once these mental obstacles are cleared and there’s a commitment to get started, it’s time to think about how your team members will react to the idea of training. They are probably thinking that training equals pain, which will doom the training program from the start. This is the final obstacle to launching your training program. Empathizing with them at the beginning and clearing their “pain” obstacle is critical

to the success of your program. Training is a team effort, so you want everyone to be excited about the process.

The first meeting, where your team will learn about the plans to make training a habit at your company, is probably the most important meeting you will ever have. The first meeting lays the foundation for the many sessions that will take place week after week. Think of it like a marathon run, a long bike race or a 5-course meal: You don’t want to start too fast! If you set too quick of a pace or try to cover too much in the first session, the performance of your future meetings will suffer, because your team will already be burnt out. Set a positive tone, and do everything you can to plan and prepare for a fun and energizing first meeting.

## PALATABLE OBJECTIVES

Think about your objectives for the first meeting:

- You want your team members to learn that it is not the company’s goal to preach at them every week.
- You want them to understand that the sessions are for their benefit and for the benefit of the entire team.
- You want them to feel that the meetings will help make your garden center a great place to work.

Here are a few fantastic ideas from garden centers and landscape companies to help you, or your presenter, generate excitement at the launch of your training program.

- Use music to energize the atmosphere or create a relaxing environment.

• Start with a team icebreaker to loosen everyone up.

• Seat attendees in a circle to be different.

• Do something fun and unexpected.

• Ask open-ended questions to generate discussion about training.

• Reward those who contribute with fun gifts.

• Smile and keep the meeting upbeat.

• Preview the topics to come, but emphasize future topic flexibility.

• Summarize and close the meeting on time with an inspirational quote.

Typically, a great first meeting will generate a positive buzz that will create anticipation for the next meeting. Your first meeting will have pleasantly surprised everyone and created widespread curiosity about the great things that are going to happen next week.

There are no impediments to creating excitement through weekly team meetings at your garden center. Training has evolved to a higher form and is completely ready to help you succeed in the 21st Century. No longer are pain and boredom tolerated; effective team meetings are fun and mentally stimulating. Now we are all ready to raise the bar of professionalism in our industry, and it isn’t going to hurt a bit! 🐾

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## CHALLENGE CALENDAR

**22** Number of participating companies

**254** Average number of employees trained per week

### February 18

Teleclass Launch Event  
Two-hour group phone conference  
with Jim Paluch  
To register, contact  
Pete at (877) 334-3600

### February Training Topics:

- “Selling new products”
- “Handling plant material”
- “Labeling and signage”
- “Developing an orientation program”

## ACTION ZONE: GARDEN CENTERS IN TRAINING

**Market.** LJ Gagne/Roosevelt Trail Garden Center in Windham, Maine, brainstormed ways to connect with its customers in the quiet winter months of January and February. Coming up with a list of workshops and seminars was the first step in its outreach strategy.

**Teamwork.** At the Agway stores of Orleans and Dennis, Mass., a new presenter stepped forward to talk about "Merchandising Magic." This person broke new ground as the first non-salaried employee to lead a session. Now, more and more people will become involved and share their knowledge with the team. Volunteer presenters will have the opportunity to sign up in this month's newsletter to lead future sessions.

Wojó's Greenhouses team members in Ortonville, Mich., met this week and discussed "The Choices We Make." The session

helped the team recognize that it can choose its attitude no matter what the circumstances.

Spider Web Gardens in Center Tuftonboro, N.H., looked for inspiration this week with its own topic called "Work Inspirations – Why Are We Here?" Everyone on the team had the chance to write down their real feelings, anonymously, about their job and their "raison d'être."

**Training.** Each individual at Sabellico's Greenhouses and Florist, Hopewell Jct., N.Y., has been working on his or her customer service skills over the last couple of weeks. Sabellico's is focusing on giving each customer three options (low price to high price) instead of assuming what a customer will pay. This helps raise the average sale and gives customers additional information. As a follow-up, employees will get the opportunity to relate their experiences at future meetings.

Spider Web Gardens evaluated its training to date with an anonymous "pop-quiz," and the average score was an eight, with one being useless and 10 being very important. The evaluation showed that the favorite topics were presented by employees, not the owner or manager! This tells us that the team appreciates learning from its direct peers the most.

**Systems.** Anderson's Home and Garden Showplace in Newport News, Va., is right on top of its sales figures with its accounting system. The employees know that the average transaction during a given time was 37 percent higher than last year.

Bayview Nurseries and Garden Center in Northfield, N.J., is going to start evaluating employee performance and tie the evaluations to possible pay increases. Keeping score and measuring performance is a great way to track progress.

The Star Spangled Girls at Sanford's in Tiverton, R.I., looked at ways to improve its business efficiency through systems. Winter is the perfect time to set goals and then concentrate on planning the route to exceed them.

**Rewards.** Sabellico's shared an idea learned at a seminar that our highest-paid employees should be answering the phone and waiting on customers. Is this the case at your business? This is a very interesting topic. What would it be like if employees were paid according to their level of skill for their particular job instead of being paid the scale for their job? What if a fantastic cashier could earn as much as the garden center manager? Which person makes the most impressions on customers? Perhaps the cashier is one of the reasons customers are loyal to the store! ☘