



Connie's Corner

Non Linear Evolution

by Connie Kratzke

The title just came to me this morning because I am an incorrigible nerd. I decided to Google my phrase to see if it was even a thing. That's when I stumbled upon the little gem, ["Evolution is Linear: Debunking Life's Little Joke,"](#) by Ronald A.

Jenner. The first two lines of the abstract read, "Linear depictions of the evolutionary process are ubiquitous in popular culture, but linear evolutionary imagery is strongly rejected by scientists who argue that evolution branches." Where the hell am I going with this? Growth in the nursery business is often perceived as planned, logical, linear, upward movement. However, in my experience, the path is a bit more Labyrinth-like.

Attending MNLA's educational events and those hosted by other growers and suppliers is one of my favorite things to do. That said, it can also inspire a sense of melancholy. When you see what can be done and compare it with what is being done, the path to Nirvana is often obscured by reality. That doesn't mean that we can't get there in baby steps.

I think there is a misconception that nursery people embark on their entrepreneurial ventures with a vast knowledge of horticulture and all of the leverageable tools and technologies required to manage it. Many of the folks I know in this industry started with common sense, some shovels and a pick-up truck. Many owned no land or significant assets. Shoveling sidewalks "evolved" into mowing lawns and planting trees. After hand-writing enough invoices to wallpaper the living room there was enough capital for software. Most people don't step into well dialed-in systems and immediately begin reaping the benefits. The few that do must embrace their opportunities with the knowledge that evolution stops for no one.

Looking at all departments and systems with an unbiased, critical eye reveals the potholes and skid marks. The unfortunate consequence: that's where your eyes will always go until a patch is made. However, you probably won't tear the exhaust system off of your entire existence if you have a plan.

The plan makes no direct demands of its drafters. Plans are really maps that indicate the status of their landmarks. They show where you can go when you're ready. Furthermore, they show all who study them what the big picture looks like. Plenty of organizations have capital improvement plans and I suspect as many don't. There are countless ways to manage and inspire. Personally, I like to have a broad understanding of what goes on in each division and what could be improved upon.

Creating a big, important plan can feel a little daunting but it doesn't have to be. Start with dreams and wishes. Keep track of them individually. What would you like to see and who do you want to be? Does that harmonize with what the organization is trying to do? How can your interests and strengths improve daily operations at your facility? What's holding you back? Simply knowing where you stand and what your priorities are is half the battle. Writing them down always helps. Once you know how you fit into your company's plan, you'll know what hotdish you bring to the table. Motivate others to make lists of their functional desires.

Once the dream is clarified, the data collection phase begins. Take inventory of the tools within your grasp and their condition. How old is the hoop house and when will it need new plastic? Will replacing the plastic result in any measurable gain or is it damage control? When funds become available, is there an improvement that can be made that will solve an issue or eliminate an inefficiency? How will you justify your future demand? A simple list of assets and their statuses ranked in order of priority becomes your shopping list. While you may not be able to gild your tater tot hotdish with (controversy alert) sour cream right away, you can make a damned good Basic Betty version!

Once you get everyone vested, you can schedule your annual potluck. That's where we're at. We are in the planning phase of a big ass potluck, to be held next winter. Summer divides us and winter re-acquaints us, but there's never enough time. By the time the events we attend for inspiration are over, we're past the point of implementation. That's okay though. The seed has been sown. We must simply remember where we planted it so it doesn't fall victim to the elements of chaos that pervade our daily lives.

My winter hobby for the last couple of years has been hydroponic gardening. This endeavor is cathartic and therapeutic for me because I can do everything I want. I'm as type A as it gets and I LOVE being the master of my plants' destinies! My tents are dialed in to the nth degree, but they didn't start that way. A concept was tested, debunked and improved upon. The path of my obsession's evolution was not linear, but branched. What I've learned through my experiment is priceless. My original courses of study were Sales & Marketing and Radio Broadcasting. I had no clue what VPD was until it was suggested that I manage it via the threads, blogs and articles

that guided me. We all come into this field in different ways and if we use our “weird” for good, there’s one hell of a tasty potluck to be had!