

QUALITY FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Build a culture of collaboration and harmony with the supplier community.

BY CINDY HANAUER

In years past, the majority of retail leaders played the part of adversarial “boss,” and suppliers played the role of humble subordinate. Today, the greatest leaders must formulate multichannel partnerships—up, down and across—in order to achieve successful dynamics within an organization.



Optimal results can no longer be achieved by simply holding the sole position of power where all decisions are made at the apex. German scholar **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** said it best: “The person who occupies the first place seldom plays the principal part.” The realization that the conduc-

tor of an orchestra never holds a musical instrument is the genesis of success in today’s modern organizations. In floriculture terms, high-quality product for our customers is impossible to achieve without a strong multichannel organization of virtuoso instrumentalists performing in rhythm and harmony.

five keys to success

Carefully selected suppliers should be at the apex of important decisions that affect business profitability, diverse product assortments, educated staff and satisfied customers. But easier said than done, right?

No doubt, there is a balance that must occur in every organization between strong leadership and the key principles of a successful supplier network. Here are my top five keys to creating a collaborative network.

1. Build an organizational platform in which suppliers are able to give their best.



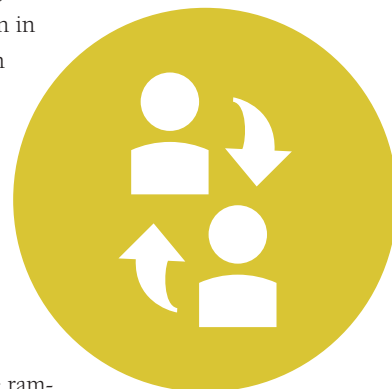
The faster and more efficient good decisions can be made at the buying level, the more successful the organization will become. Basic protocols of planning time-lines, organized product reviews, purchase-order execution, receiving guidelines and payment schedules will clear the path for more creative, customer-facing

activities to thrive.

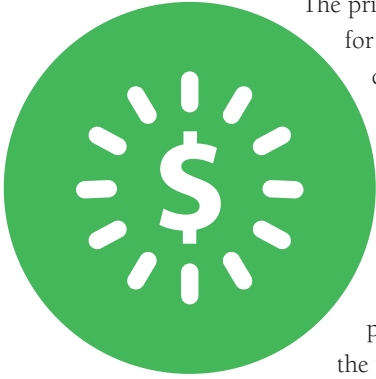
2. Honesty works both ways.

Complaints, when given in a professional manner, can help both parties achieve what is best for consumers. An open forum in which suppliers can freely provide input on how the buying organization can improve is equally important.

Because of past negative ramifications, some suppliers may be hesitant to provide constructive critiques. As a leader, tell suppliers that feedback is not only accepted, it’s the lifeblood of a good working relationship for the future.



3. Think outside the price box.



The price an organization pays for products is an aggregate of the cost-of-goods *plus* the tertiary services a supplier provides to the buying organization. It's counterproductive for individual parties to try to negotiate deals that are only right for themselves. Both parties must think in terms of the return on investment for the person on the opposite side of the

table and how both sides can achieve mutual profitability. Consider these questions:

- Is scan data being utilized for better crop planning?
- Are unnecessary start-stops, purchase-order changes, backtracking and incorrect data being mitigated?
- Are pack counts and freight planning fully coordinated and optimized?
- Are good protocols in place for accurate receiving, quality-assurance inspections and quality reporting?
- Are new communication technologies being used in place of expensive flights, hotels, sample shipping, store education, planning meetings and regional shows?

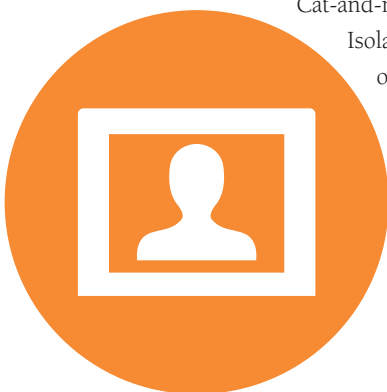
Remember, value travels downstream—not upstream.

4. Be a conduit to new innovations and broader markets.

Buyers and suppliers, equally, own the discovery of new innovations and how they're leveraged to find emerging markets and build broader growth. The best retailers are well-studied in new modernizations, and the best suppliers have multiple layers of expertise to bring forward. Create an open environment where there is an equal exchange of ideas followed by a mutually ambitious follow-through of those ideas.



5. Stay transparent.



Cat-and-mouse games are dead and gone. Isolation will bring weakness to the organization and minimize its overall effectiveness. Create a safe forum where frequent exchanges between buyers and suppliers can take place. As a leader, don't aspire to be the best *on* the team. Instead, inspire to be the best *for* the team. **sf**



ONLINE BONUS

Have you missed some of Cindy Hanauer's great columns? No worry! Her past articles for *Super Floral* are now online.

Just go to www.superfloral.com and click on "Cindy Hanauer."

ARTICLE TOPICS INCLUDE:

- "Eight ways to boost your Valentine's Day business."
- "Sky-high balloon sales for spring."
- "Strategies for a beautiful Mother's Day."
- "Best practices for weddings."
- "Nurturing your department's financial roots."
- "Your labor investment."
- "Five steps to Christmas success."



For more floral news and education, visit Cindy Hanauer's website at www.grandcentralfloral.com. She also can be reached at Grand Central Floral, 12620-3 Beach Blvd., Jacksonville, Fla., 32246; (844) MYFLORAL (693-5672) or (904) 327-1951; or cindy@grandcentralfloral.com.