

# GARDENING & MANAGEMENT: WHAT THEY HAVE IN COMMON

**If a gardener simply gave a plant an intimidating look and barked out a command to "grow", you'd think he was crazy. So why do we put up with this sort of behaviour in managers?**

**by Dan Bobinski**

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Like most husbands, I bought my wife roses for Mother's Day. These weren't cut flowers, but rather half a dozen rose bushes. The resulting rose garden has been an ongoing gift for both of us: She gets to enjoy roses all summer long, and I get a bit of outdoor therapy tending the garden each weekend. I find it's an excellent time to let my mind relax.

Interestingly, gardening provides some good analogies for management practices.

For example, gardeners don't make plants grow. The genetic coding inside each plant does that. A gardener simply creates conditions that are conducive for plants to grow: if those conditions are maintained, then growth occurs.

In the same way that we can't make a seed grow, a manager cannot motivate people. The word motivation literally means "a reason to move." Since everyone has a reason to move, everyone already has motivation.

Think about it. Whenever a manager is frustrated by a perceived lack of motivation, either the manager hasn't figured out (or, heaven forbid, inquired about) the employee's motivations, or the manager has created some kind of environment that squelches the employee's natural drive.

So, if what's truly in our control is the ability to create conditions for peoples' own motivation to move them forward, what conditions should we create?

The answer to that is "it depends." Every person has different reasons for working, and those reasons are as individual as the person. So, we have to ask. We have to observe. And we have to want to know.

I'm amazed how many managers will huddle up and talk among themselves, saying "I can't seem to get Jack motivated." Even if they ask each other, the best they're going to get is a guess. They need to ask Jack directly!

What motivates one person may not motivate the next, and as much as it's hard to fathom, just because something motivates us doesn't mean it will or even should motivate anyone else.

So, again, the main thing is to ask! A good gardener is always inquisitive about the conditions of the garden. Is fertilizer needed? More water? Less water? Are there any unwanted pests or diseases?

Gardeners ask these questions and make any needed adjustments because they know what kind of results they'll get if they simply give a plant an intimidating look and bark out a command to "grow!"

What's strange is that many managers try that very technique on people - usually with the same results as the gardener would get! Then, instead of trying something different next time they usually just blame the worker.

What's even stranger is that we accept such behavior in a manager, but we would laugh at the same behavior in a gardener.

In looking at a few more analogies, a gardener select plants appropriate to the purpose and location of the garden. For example, if the garden is in full sun, a gardener chooses plants that do well in sun. In the same way, managers need to be aware of the mission and vision of the workplace and select employees that will subscribe to that vision.

And if the garden is for flowers and not vegetables, a gardener will shop only for flowers, and he'll look for the best he can find. Similarly, a manager should have clear job descriptions for all the positions and have a good interview strategy to identify the best possible applicants.

Pulling weeds is another good analogy. In a garden, weeds can grow so big that they use up a lot of soil nutrients and water, thus diminishing what's available for the plant. In the workplace, weeds represent rumors and non-productive attitudes that deplete energy away from the real work that must be done. A manager needs to eliminate those to get the best levels of productivity.

Essentially, managers would do well to think like gardeners and create conditions that lead to optimal growth.

But of all the analogies that can be made, I believe the most important is to be inquisitive. I didn't know much about growing roses two months ago, but a bit of study and some questions to experts helped me create conditions for beautiful flowers.

**Bottom line:** Be curious and get feedback on the conditions of your workplace and how it could be better - and ask the employees what kind of conditions they need to perform at their best. By tending to those conditions your workplace will thrive.