

Dad's wisdom has been invaluable



by PETER MEZITT

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When I reflect back on my 22-year career, I realize how much my dad, Wayne Mezitt, helped me get to where I am today. It actually starts further back when, as a child, he instilled in me a strong work ethic, which was passed down to him by his father, Edmund Mezitt. Dad told me that if I wanted to succeed in life, it wasn't enough to "just show up" to work — you had to set goals for yourself by looking at work assignments as challenges.

My dad taught me to approach tasks by asking, "What do I have to get done, and how much time should it take me to do it?" My first task as an 11-year-old was to weed 100-foot-long rhododendron beds for \$1, and he took the time to tell me that a good weeder always pulls the roots out. There it was — an early pay-on-performance and quality-control mindset instilled in me forever!

Through my high school years, I worked in the fields alongside many kids who were my age or older. The pressures of being the "boss' son" would be discussed around the dinner table. Early on, my dad helped me form a strategy of hard work and constant learning that would ultimately gain people's respect and give me a sense of pride. My parents also taught me to deal with criticisms along the way by always putting myself in other people's shoes and look for the good in all people.

Today, I am the fourth generation of my family in charge of an 87-year-old business — Weston Nurseries Inc., Hopkinton, MA. The nursery has just gone through a challenging period where my father had to purchase the company from his brother, Roger Mezitt. I watched my father succeed in getting the company through the past few years by trusting other people to help him and keeping a positive attitude.

He now has placed his trust in me to lead the company into the fifth generation. My father showed me that in order for Weston Nurseries to grow and be profitable, I must surround myself with people who want to be accountable for their parts of the business, who constantly work on their parts of the business to improve things and who keep a positive atti-

tude. The company is run by managers, most of whom report to me. I try to hire the best people and empower them to make decisions. I look to praise people whenever I can, and I try to immediately correct things that don't look right to me. The managers, in turn, manage their people similarly.

By working closely with the managers, we have professionalized the business in many ways. We have a solid infrastructure akin to larger-company business models (performance reviews, monthly team member meetings, manager retreats, standard operating procedures and company intranet, to name a few), and we have managed to create a more desirable work environment that attracts great people to come to work for us and keeps great people working here.

My father taught me to never forget where we came from. Even though our main focus today is selling plants instead of growing plants, our core values remain strong. Our company culture is based on creating long-term relationships with our customers, vendors, co-workers, community, environment and our industry.

Our horticultural sales staff provides the most trusted customer service in the industry. I am proud of how our sales staff puts themselves in their customers' shoes and recommends what is best for them — even if this means sacrificing the "quick sale" for the company. We also have an extremely high standard for plant quality, and that has given us a strong position as our customers' first choice for the best plants in the area.

There are some differences in the way I run the company from the way my father did. We have people who we hired from

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outside the industry running three key positions, while our experts in horticulture continue to interact with our customers. Back in the day, this would have been unimaginable. I find that working with these business-minded managers allows the company to make strategic changes easier than my dad was able to. Most of our key programs started from the ground floor and were pushed forward by our management team. My role is to make sure everything we do continues to add value to our customers.

Most of all, my father taught me to be more humble and to do what is right for the longevity of the family business. You don't see many fourth-generation businesses these days. He taught me that when a company makes it that far, there is tremendous potential for success based on its lasting power alone. There is name recognition and merit associated with an enduring company that newer businesses have a hard time establishing. I feel it is my responsibility to build stronger brand recognition within the space we own for our customers. For us, this is providing the best plants and horticultural knowledge to consumers.

I now realize that the measure of my success is to take care of the family's business. I believe this can be accomplished by working effectively with people who also love this company and do everything possible to capitalize on the opportunities that come with a recognized brand name. Surrounding myself with great people with positive attitudes will result in great decisions and well-thought-out strategic changes in our future. It is clear to me that the ultimate measure of my success during my tenure is to strengthen this passionate culture we have developed so that it carries over to the fifth generation. That is the ultimate goal.

I look forward to working on this every day; my father has allowed me to do it, so what more can I ask for!



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