

# floral management

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THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY

JULY 2019 | VOLUME 36 | NUMBER 4



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A PUBLICATION OF THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FLORISTS



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JULY 2019 | VOLUME 36 | NUMBER 4

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FLORAL MANAGEMENT (ISSN 1067-4772) (USPS-936-400) IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FLORISTS (SAF), THE ASSOCIATION THAT PROVIDES MARKETING, BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES FOR THE ENTIRE FLORICULTURE INDUSTRY. STATEMENTS OF FACT OR OPINION IN FLORAL MANAGEMENT ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHORS AND MAY NOT REFLECT THE OFFICIAL POLICY OF THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FLORISTS. PERIODICALS POSTAGE IS PAID AT ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314-3406 AND ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. ALL MATERIAL IN THIS MAGAZINE IS COPYRIGHTED 2011 BY SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FLORISTS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. \$25 OF SAF MEMBERSHIP DUES REPRESENTS A MEMBER'S SUBSCRIPTION TO THIS PUBLICATION. SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR NON-MEMBERS ARE AVAILABLE FOR \$49 PER YEAR. SINGLE COPIES: \$4. MATERIALS MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION.

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## WHY FRIENDLY ISN'T ENOUGH

> “Those diamond earrings are \$75,000.”

That was the message I received recently on a trip to a Tiffany jewelry store in New York City, where I live. I wasn't buying those earrings. Instead, I was there to explore the way other businesses sell their wares and how we can learn from them to make our industry stronger. And, believe me, we have a lot to learn.

For instance, I highly doubt that the average sales rep working at Tiffany would buy a \$75,000 pair of earrings, but the woman who waited on me sure acted as though she did. Furthermore, she made me feel just as comfortable and welcome as a customer when I explained that my budget was closer to \$500!

That begs the question. Why can't the typical flower shop employee comfortably offer a customer a \$100 arrangement to celebrate his wife's birthday? The missing link is training.

The staff at Tiffany, Nordstrom or any other luxury retailer are *constantly* trained not to sell from their own pocket, but to offer customers the appropriate item for their needs. They are taught not to fear rejection. Furthermore, that philosophy is reinforced by management to become a cornerstone of their sales and service policy. The floral industry needs to take staff development just as seriously.

The typical sales and service mindset in most flower shops is rooted in the 20th century when you could get away with asking, “How much do you want to spend?” and telling every customer, “Our arrangements start at...” Customers' needs, demands and expectations, however, have evolved — and the floral industry hasn't kept up.

Unfortunately, too many flower shop owners I speak with operate under the false assumption that they don't have to do any proactive sales training with their team. Something I hear a lot is, “My staff doesn't need training, they're very friendly.” To think that your staff is giving exemplary, thorough and professional service just because they're friendly is horribly out of touch with reality. Do you think the staff at Tiffany sell so effortlessly simply because they're friendly?

Here's another angle on this need to train your team. A few years ago, I was

talking with a shop owner and he mentioned that he had visited the local mall the previous night with his wife. They took a shortcut through JCPenney — intending to spend their time and money at Macy's. But when they walked into JCPenney, they were warmly greeted. When my client's wife stopped by a display of watches, a clerk immediately offered assistance. Finally, on their way out of the store another clerk stopped folding sweaters and said, “Thanks for visiting us.”

My customer stated that they were never big JCPenney fans, but they were going to go back because they felt so welcomed. Amazing! The merchandise was the same as it's always been, but the demeanor of the staff changed and that made the lasting impression.

I told him that what he experienced was not random staff who were filled with joy about working retail. Instead, what he and his wife saw was training in action. In other words, I guarantee that the walls in the staff break room were covered in signage reminding them to engage customers as soon as they make eye contact. I bet that the supervisors and manager regularly talk about how and when to best help customers. In other words, it's a culture that management works to create and maintain.

Confident salespeople and engaging staff don't just happen. They need to be trained. And training is not just a quick pep talk when you have time on a Thursday afternoon or a few weeks before a major holiday. It needs to become part of ongoing activities in your store. If florists placed as much concern on sales and service skills as design skills, we would have an amazingly robust and vibrant industry. And we can make that happen. But you have to get started, today. 🌱

**Tim Huckabee, FSC**, is the founder of FloralStrategies LLC and a regular contributor to Floral Management magazine. Read his sales column (p. 14) and take part in a live webinar on July 24 at [safnow.org/webinars](http://safnow.org/webinars).





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## THE INDUSTRY COMES TOGETHER



> I recently hosted a baby shower for my cousin, Samantha. Of course, I had flowers. I ordered a centerpiece from my local florist (a beautiful, seasonal design that I later gifted to Sam) and purchased adorable succulents to liven up my entryway. In the runup to the party, I picked up some loose stems so that my sister, aunt and I could arrange them together. We set vases and containers around the house.

Because I've worked for so long in this industry — and met so many of you, the hard-working people behind all of those beautiful flowers and foliage — it didn't occur to me to

decorate differently. What would a party be without flowers (and foliage and plants, for that matter)? But I was a little surprised by the reaction of the twenty- and thirty-something guests. They delighted in the flowers — which was great — but a few of them also seemed a little surprised. One later admitted to me that she didn't think of a baby shower as a "flower occasion."

Ever since the party, I've been thinking about that comment, and about what kept this young woman — a plant-loving millennial with disposable income to spend — from thinking of flowers specifically as something she should incorporate into her daily life. It's a question with which so many of us in the industry are wrestling: How do we get more people to buy more flowers more often? How do we better make the case to consumers that flowers positively affect lives? How do we reach customers and stand out from other gift and floral vendors? (One thing the baby shower underscored for me: The experience of flowers goes a long way. Not long after the event, a guest told me she'd picked up some stems herself, a self-purchase she hadn't made in ages.)

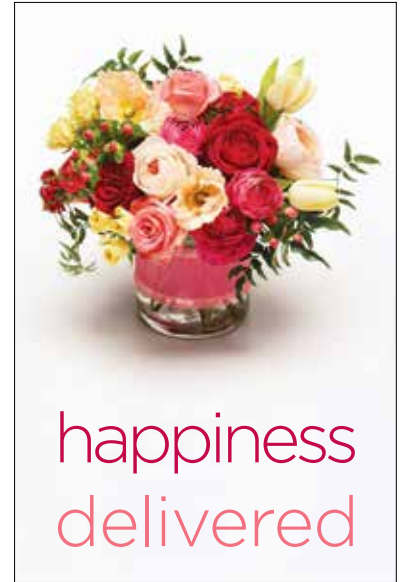
Those are questions we ask each other (and our volunteer leaders and our members) every day at the Society of American Florists, and they are central to the programming you'll find this September at SAF Amelia Island 2019, our 135<sup>th</sup> annual convention. At the event, SAF is bringing together 60-plus experts, from inside and outside the industry, to discuss and find solutions for some of the biggest challenges we're all facing. Beyond those experts, SAF conventions draw hundreds of attendees — peers you can turn to and talk with, to find common ground, new solutions and ideas big and small that will help your business flourish, and help the industry grow. Our cover story, which begins on **p. 22**, offers a preview, but, if you're ready to make serious changes to your business, to challenge your own thinking, and to find new pathways to success, partners and friends, this is an event you won't want to miss.

I'm also excited to share Bruce Wright's story on tulips (**p. 28**), a flower so many consumers think of as a springtime-only event. In reality, scientific advancements in breeding, shipping and growing techniques have turned tulips into one of our most versatile offerings. The history of those advancements, which Bruce charts in his story, is one you should share with customers.

We've also got blogging tips from one of the longest running blogs in the industry (**p. 40**), news on FTD's bankruptcy — and what florists think it could mean for their businesses, and callas, callas, callas — new varieties (**p. 20**) and designs (**p. 42**) and tips on how to keep those beauties looking like the showstoppers that they are (**p. 48**). Happy reading — and we hope to see you and learn together in September.

Mary Westbrook, Editor in Chief  
mwestbrook@safnow.org

## More Online



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**LABOR OF LOVE** It's no secret attracting and retaining talent is a challenge. In June SAF presented a three-part webinar series on HR. Sessions offered strategies on how to hire smarter and improve your onboarding process, and presented advice for dealing with problematic staff. Watch the entire series at [safnow.org/webinars](http://safnow.org/webinars).



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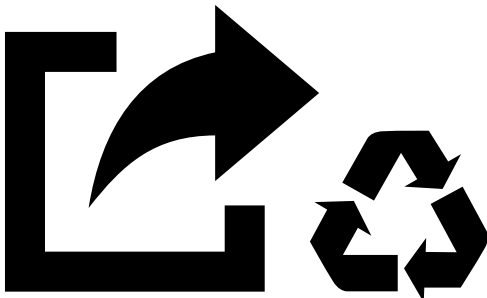
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## This is Holiday Season.

Ho, ho, how many more days of glitter, gilding and greening?! The holidays are a marathon that you can only win with preparation. So, get your Midnight on this year and quit overdoing it with the greening. Because “less is more” is the new way to holiday. #ThisIsFloral

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## FLORAL INDUSTRY MOURNS LOSS OF SHELBY SHY, AAF



> Smart, forward-thinking business-woman. Dedicated (and hilarious) friend and colleague. Devoted daughter. Loving mother. All-around bright light.

These are just some of the descriptions being used to memorialize Shelby Shy, AAF, a past president of the Arkansas Florists Association and former Society of American Florists volunteer leader, who worked for many years in her family's business, Shirley's Flower Studio in Rogers, Arkansas. Shy died May 8 at the age of 38, survived by her parents, Jo Buttram, AAF, and Randy Buttram, and her two young sons, Brooks and Coleman.

In addition to serving as AFA's president and on the group's board, Shy led regional educational sessions, served on SAF's Consumer Marketing Committee, presented a number of times at the association's annual convention and wrote more than 40 posts for AboutFlowersBlog.com, part of SAF's consumer website.

News of her death was greeted with sadness, as SAF members shared their memories of Shy on the association's social media pages.

"Shelby's star needs to shine on," wrote Heather Waits of Bloomtastic in Columbus, Ohio. "This girl was unforgettable. I'll miss her dearly!"

Clara Varga-Gonzales of Fleurish Coaching, and formerly of Tiger Lily in Charleston, wrote, "Shelby will be greatly missed. Our hearts are broken."

Read more about Shy's life at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline). A memorial tribute has been established to honor Shy by the American Floral Endowment. Find out more at [endowment.org](http://endowment.org). 🌸





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## FIRST-TIMERS: 'JUST BOOK IT AND GO' TO SAF AMELIA ISLAND 2019

> Sharing ideas and learning ways to improve your business are the best reasons to attend SAF Amelia Island 2019, according to last year's first-time participants.

Networking was a highlight for Tanya Anderson, co-owner of Wascana Flower Shoppe in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, who attended with mom and co-owner, Petra Janssen.

"You learn so much by listening to what works for others," Anderson said. "The support and knowledge that we gain from our industry peers is incredibly valuable. The energy we create at convention when we are all together you will never find elsewhere."

They also learned a lot about themselves, said Anderson: "It was neat to

see what we were doing right and what we could improve on."

She said they not only learned the skills to make those improvements but also how to make them last. They also learned "a ton about social media marketing, care and handling, our own business culture and how to adapt it so that we are just generally 'better.'"

"It was 100 percent worth every penny and second," she said. "We came home with an energy for our business that we haven't had in years. That alone was worth everything."

Amber Ballance, general manager of Fairfield Flowers in Virginia Beach, Virginia, agreed. "I think that it is so important to refresh yourself as a florist ... and meet other people that love flowers

— just the positivity of it was amazing. It's a phenomenal experience," she said.

"One of the coolest things for me was [meeting] people who were my age in the industry. I don't always see that," added the 32-year-old.

Ballance loved the hands-on workshops, too: "I think as florists and designers, we like to be able to make something while we're there."

She is still applying what she learned from the convention, especially the hiring advice, and is looking forward to the Advanced Design Techniques workshop.

For grower Farai Madziva, vice president at Kitayama Brothers Inc. in Watsonville, California, the SAF convention was an opportunity to meet with and understand what matters most to wholesalers, retailers and other growers.

"Meeting with florists was a big plus for me as I got to hear issues on quality and trends," he said, adding that he learned the importance of providing product information to clients on postharvest handling and treatment, cooling and hydration and more.

Anderson's advice to people on the fence about attending: "Just book it and go," she said. "Don't overthink it. Investing in yourself through your business is worth every penny."

SAF Amelia Island 2019, SAF's 135th Annual Convention, takes place Sept. 18-21 in Amelia Island, Florida. For details and to register, go to [safnow.org/annual-convention](http://safnow.org/annual-convention). 🌿



**FIRST AND FOREMOST** Among the 107 first-timers at last year's SAF convention: Tricia Smith of Twinbrook Floral Design in Fairfax; Tanya Anderson of Wascana Flower in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada; Farai Madziva of Kitayama Brothers-Watsonville in Watsonville, California; Dhuru and Sonal Kapadia of Conroy's Flowers in Mission Viejo, California, and Margaret Fleegal of Twinbrook Floral Design.

## 'HUGE WIN': USDA PUBLISHES 2018 FLORICULTURE CROPS SUMMARY

> The U.S. Department of Agriculture published the 2018 Floriculture Crops Summary — a report that came about as a direct result of lobbying by the Society of American Florists and meetings in Washington, D.C., between SAF members and lawmakers during the group's annual Congressional Action Days.

The report provides benchmarks to identify market trends and project sales opportunities, making its publication "a huge win for the floral industry,"



**HUGE WIN** Last March, dozens of SAF members traveled to Washington, D.C., to advocate for industry issues, including publication of the 2018 Floriculture Crops Summary.

## WHERE TO SOURCE FLOWERS FOR PETAL IT FORWARD? JUST ASK.

> With the 2019 Petal It Forward date set for Wednesday, Oct. 23, now is the time for industry members to start laying the groundwork for their local events.

Asking for donations or discounts from suppliers for Petal It Forward may seem daunting; however, think about who you have an excellent relationship with and start there, advised Justin Sheffield, president of Ashland Addison Florist in Chicago.

"We have had great partners with both farms and wholesalers who have offered us product for free or at a substantial discount," said Sheffield, who suggested contacting suppliers at least 4-5 weeks early to allow for ordering lead time and planning.

"If it's your first time approaching this supplier, ask your salesperson for the company contact for promotions and marketing; usually that person has the best voice to get a request like this approved," he added.

Since 2015, the Society of American Florists has led the industry in Petal It Forward. During this "random acts of kindness" flower giveaway, consumers receive two bouquets (or flowers) — one to keep and one to share — to demonstrate the Rutgers University research that shows flowers make people happy and are encouraged to post on social media about their experience using the hashtag **#petalitforward**.

"We've found consumers are pretty much happy to get any type of flower; that flexibility will help your supplier

give you product at a great price or even completely free," Sheffield said.

When Stacey Cofka, owner of A Blossom Shop in Bayville, New Jersey, contacted her wholesaler about Petal It Forward, she was pleasantly surprised that they were already on board, offering discounted bouquets.

"My salesperson actually came to my store to help me hand out bouquets the first year we did it. They even brought us pre-printed T-shirts promoting Petal It Forward," said Cofka, who ordered 30 bouquets her first year and doubled it last year.

Some wholesalers reached out to retailers. When the Bill Doran Company contacted Melissa Maas, owner of Bank of Flowers in Menomonee Falls

and Pewaukee, Wisconsin, to ask if she wanted to participate, she quickly agreed.

"They [Bill Doran] are amazing. They wanted to support us and the florist community and we took advantage of it," said Maas. "We were very lucky. They had pre-made bouquets that were actually quite lovely for a steal."

Like Sheffield, Maas recommended working with your go-to wholesaler. "If you have a great relationship with them, they understand your vision and culture and they will support that," said Maas, who has ordered 400 bouquets the past two years and will again this year.

"I feel that Petal It Forward is a really important thing to do because you have the whole nation behind you," she added. "It's a big movement. It's not just your little shop trying to do this one thing."

Last year, floral teams in 410 cities in all 50 states, plus Washington, D.C., took to the streets in 457 local Petal It Forward events. Public relations and social media efforts for the 2018 Petal It Forward garnered nearly 90 million consumer impressions, reaching people far beyond the direct flower recipients.

SAF provides resources to help members Petal It Forward at **safnow.org/petalitforward**. Notify SAF of your event by completing the Petal It Forward Participation Form at **safnow.org/PIFform**. 🌱

**Renee Houston Zemanski is a contributing writer for Floral Management. fmeditor@safnow.org**



**PERSONAL STORIES** A big part of Petal It Forward is getting consumers to post about their experiences, as this recipient did, after receiving flowers from Bank of Flowers in Menomonee Falls and Pewaukee, Wisconsin.

said Drew Gruenburg, SAF's chief operating officer.

"The lobbying by SAF members during Congressional Action Days was a big reason why USDA decided to produce the 2018 report," Gruenburg said. "But also, we worked hand in hand with the USDA's Agriculture Research Service to identify creative ways to fund the report, and ARS was very receptive to the suggestions and recommendations provided by SAF."

The report is the only source of annual data on annual bedding and garden

plants, potted herbaceous perennials, potted flowering plants for indoor and patio use, foliage plants for indoor or patio use, cut flowers, cut cultivated greens, and propagative floriculture materials.

It shows trends in domestic production and helps show year-to-year direction. In addition, the report is used in determining government agricultural policy and data for academic studies.

After the USDA decided it could not publish the report in 2016 and 2017 due to budget constraints, SAF initiated a

strategic advocacy campaign to resume the publication of the report to provide the floriculture industry with critical information it needs.

SAF thanks other industry organizations that supported the effort to secure publication of the 2018 report. The coalition included the American Society for Horticultural Science, AmericanHort, CalFlowers, the California Cut Flower Commission, the Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association, and the Produce Marketing Association. 🌱



# snapshot

Distinctive Gardens DIXON, ILLINOIS



**PARTY TIME** With all of its acreage and its historic barn, Distinctive Gardens has also become an event space, hosting weddings, concerts, festivals, and private parties every year.

**PROFIT-MINDED SPACES** When the team at Distinctive Gardens undertook the 2016 remodel, they had three objectives in mind: Streamline the time it took for care and maintenance of the interior space; increase profit margins; and shift the focus more to plants. "The result over the last three years has been a boon," LeFevre said. "We no longer fret over a space that doesn't turn quickly. Maintenance time has dropped radically. It's easy to keep clean... It just feels good."





## DOWN HOME AND FUNCTIONAL

➤ “Modern, rustic, zen,” is one way that Lisa Higby LeFevre describes the vibe at Distinctive Gardens, a business that opened in 1999 and is situated on 7.5 acres, with retail space totaling 10,000 square feet across several buildings — a figure that also includes outdoor perennial and nursery areas. In 2016, LeFevre and her husband, Bud, renovated their 120-year-old barn (which functions as a plant shop and event space). The goal: Combine the best of old and new, so that customers feel inspired and excited, but also as if they are stepping into a space that already is familiar and welcoming — *while* putting a bigger emphasis on plants, the heart and soul of the business, and less on gift items. “If you can imagine an Apple shop meets plant shop, with an upcycled twist, you’ll come pretty close to the feel we hope to present,” explained LeFevre. 🌿

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**LET THERE BE LIGHT** Distinctive Gardens has focused a great deal on lighting in-store. “We upgraded to LED lighting, added more tracks and housings to the existing track lighting, and lit up display shelving,” LeFevre said. “An effort was made to conceal as much of this infrastructure as possible. We wanted ambiance, not a light store.” Meanwhile, most product displays are “made from reclaimed materials,” LeFevre added. “And if not, a select few items reflect the ‘aged-clean’ look.”



## BIGGER IS BETTER

> This month I wanted to give you a different angle on these calls by reaching out to a shop in Texas that has gone through my complete training process to see if they are abiding by what I taught them, or if some of the nasty old habits I so often discover in these calls have returned.

The employee was not expecting my call, so I caught her doing what she normally does. I also used a fake name and blocked the caller ID so she did not put on her "game face." Instead, as you will hear, she handled me smoothly and naturally. Overall, I was very pleased with the way I was treated. But there's always room for improvement.

### The Opportunity: An Employer Gives Thanks

I told the caller I was from out of town, a new customer, and on a mission to thank an employee for landing a big contract. I started to plant the seeds of my intention with casual comments, as customers regularly do, and she did pay attention. As always, I did not mention a dollar amount or color scheme, with the hopes that the rep would offer the appropriate size and budget for my needs as well as selling me an open order based on what they had in stock (instead of asking the problematic question, "What's her favorite flower?").

### Thumbs Up: Efficient, Attentive and Thorough Service

Maybe it's the New Yorker in me, but I like friendly, efficient and attentive service without lots of unnecessary questions or chitchat. And you'll hear the professional manner in which she maintained control of the call, and me!

Like every major floral POS, their system had her take the card message before talking about the flowers, and she nailed this part of the call by both commenting on the card and selling according to what she had learned — not just the occasion but the scope of the occasion and who the flowers had to represent.

### TIM'S CALLING...LIVE

Want to dig deeper into Huckabee's advice — and get direct feedback on your own questions? Tune in for "Tim's Calling...Live" on July 24 at 2 p.m., a 30-minute webinar available free to SAF members on [safnow.org/webinars](http://safnow.org/webinars). The session includes 10 minutes of Q&A time.

When you listen to the recording of the call, notice that she seamlessly offered a finishing touch (my training term for any add-on) to personalize the gift and to boost the value of the sale. Finally, I was pleased that upon offering me a price range, she did not automatically assume the higher point, offer to meet in the middle or — worse — ask me how much I wanted to spend.

### Thumbs Down: Think Even Bigger

Collectively, we're often guilty of two mistakes: not thinking outside the box when an extraordinary situation presents itself and selling at the prices we would spend personally. While I do give her kudos for starting me where she did, I think a better response would have been, "Wow, that's amazing. Let's send her something spectacular to celebrate her achievement" and go on to offer me a design starting at \$250 or more. Yes, \$250, since the worst thing that a customer can say is "no." Furthermore, I constantly stress that a big budget does not have to translate into a big design. For example, "Consider sending her a gorgeous arrangement of our premium flowers in vibrant summer colors but designed low and compact for her to enjoy on her desk or in her office. That would be priced from \$250 to \$300."

### The Takeaway: Consistent, Ongoing Training Pays Off

To keep your team sounding good, serving better and selling high, you have to focus on continuing education, training and inspiration — a point I also make this month on p. 2 in a Viewpoint column. I get that you're busy, pulled in many directions and feel like you're walking into an organized storm every morning. However, part of my motivation for writing this column and sharing the recorded calls is to provide you, the shop owner or manager, with a toolkit to focus on increasing and expanding your team's sales skills — skills that are just as vital as your designer's creative abilities! To keep sales moving upward as we head into summer, make sales and customer service a hot topic of conversation in your store. You'll love the results. I promise. 🌸



### The Recording

You're only half-done learning from this column. Next step, gather your staff 'round a store computer, read this column to them and then play the recording of my call to this shop by visiting [safnow.org/timscalling](http://safnow.org/timscalling). Turn it into a group discussion: Ask your team for feedback on what they heard and have them talk about how they can make better sales like an employer's thank-you gift to a high-performing employee moving forward.



MARY LYNN STRAND/SHUTTERSTOCK



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## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

# Jennifer Moats



### Shipping, Marketing and Inventory Oregon Flowers Aurora, Oregon

> At Oregon Flowers, Jennifer Moats is the person who makes sure the right flowers are in the right place at the right time. She's something of a logistics genius, a fact she attributes to her passion for detail. "I sometimes feel like our staff thinks I overdo my checking, but I've learned that when mistakes occur, it's usually simple human error," she said. "It's so easy to transpose numbers and input an order wrong."

Moats originally planned to put her eagle eye for detail to work as a legal secretary, but when she couldn't find a position, she started looking for jobs close to home. Oregon Flowers — a five-minute commute — had an opening in shipping and general office work. That was 20-plus years ago. Today Moats relishes what she calls her "dream job. I handle sales to local wholesalers in Portland, Salem and Eugene, track inventory and do the shipping and sales order paperwork."

### Favorite tool:

"I'm a spreadsheet nerd — and I have adapted the job to include even more

spreadsheets. Mostly we work in Google sheets, so everyone on staff can access it. It's super convenient and provides good accountability, too. I can know at a glance where orders are in process and where problems might occur."

### When I'm not at work:

"You can find me on the road with my husband and dog. Our favorite escape is camping, and we try to go at least one weekend a month. We visit state and county parks, in the mountains or on a river. The other place you'll find me is spending time with our first grandchild, who was just born in February."

### Describe your kryptonite:

"That's easy — anything green and growing. Ironically, given the company I work for, I myself have a black thumb. I had a succulent in my office, and I killed it. I have one orchid that came back, so that's my success story (although it's looking a little rough), along with the Shasta daisies in my yard. Mostly I'm just good with cut flowers." 🌿

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## ASK A LAWYER

### Salaried vs. Exempt?

**"Is there a difference between an employee who is exempt and an employee who is salaried?"**

Yes, there is a big distinction. The term "salaried employee" refers to an employee who is paid a set salary rather than on an hourly basis, whereas "exempt" refers to a specific type of employee who is exempt from federal, state and local minimum wage and overtime requirements.

Typically, to be exempt from the federal overtime and minimum wage requirements (under the Fair Labor Standards Act), an employee must be paid a certain guaranteed salary *and* have a specific type of duties (as described in the law). The Department of Labor publishes a set of fact sheets on its website, describing the various FLSA exemptions. (Find out more at [dol.gov](http://dol.gov).) Many states and localities also have overtime and minimum wage requirements and have their own rules about which types of employees are exempt (that may be similar to but vary from the federal rules).

SAF partners with Paley Rothman, a Bethesda, Maryland law firm, so that members can get fast, free answers to business legal questions. Have a question you want to ask? Call Jessica Summers at (301) 968-3402. Be sure to mention that you are an SAF member.



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## SUMMERTIME SERVICE SHAPE-UP

> Customer service, by definition, is the advice, guidance and assistance provided to consumers by companies and organizations that provide products and/or services. Good customer service is when those products and services are provided in a professional, kind, friendly, even sympathetic manner to ensure the customer's satisfaction. Good service sets many businesses apart from their competitors and can often mean the difference between success and failure. We also understand what poor customer service is: It's when we fail reasonable expectations of the consumer, often caused by a lacking on the business' part either due to poor planning, poor management or even a poor attitude.

At our business, we've learned it's helpful to distill our basic service philosophy into a few easy-to-understand points, and we've also found that summertime is a good time to return to the topic — to get you and your team ready for the busy fall and winter seasons ahead. Here are some of the points we highlight at our stores.

### Emphasize Empathy

As florists, we are there for all of life's big moments: birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, baby showers and, of course, funerals. With all of these oc-

casions there is a lot of emotion for our customers. It is important to remain professional, but to share in their special moments, both joyful and sorrowful. One distracted moment from an employee who is helping a grieving family ordering memorial flowers can turn into a costly mistake in the age of online reviews. Teach your employees to be compassionate without getting pulled too far into a client's emotions. Be happy or sad with them as the moment dictates and then be ready for the next customer who most likely has an entirely new set of emotions. Practicing mindfulness and meditation can help with this.

for them and when they're in season. It is likely that between a few members of your staff you'll have most answers that customers are looking for, and if you don't, be honest and offer to discover new information with them. Good customer service sometimes involves looking up new information on the internet and learning together.

Good customer service is often about the little things that you do. Recently we received a compliment from a customer who had ordered and pre-paid for a prom bouquet from another shop, but didn't make it there before they closed to pick it up (nor did they

**"Your customers chose to shop with you. They took their valuable time and decided to spend some of it with you, so it is important to appreciate that and give them some of your time as well."**

### Practice Patience

Your customers chose to shop with you. They took their valuable time and decided to spend some of it with you, so it is important to appreciate that and give them some of your time as well. We all know that at peak times (Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, or during a busy prom or graduation season) patience among employees can run short. They are inundated by so many tasks they may forget that their most important one is to provide good customer service. No one wants to be rushed and everyone wants to be given the time to convey themselves. So while you're being a good patient listener you'll be scoring good customer service points as well.

receive a courtesy reminder call about their pickup). Desperate not to send their son and his date to prom flowerless, they found their way to our shop, and we were able to make them a beautiful clutch bouquet on the spot. Their unsolicited online review read, "...Despite how busy they were, Stein Your Florist was open and able to save the day. With kindness and shared excitement their staff took great care of us." People remember those moments.

While going above and beyond for good customer service is great and encouraged, that doesn't mean that the customer is always right. It is the florist's choice to decide when to surrender to a difficult or incorrect customer for the sake of good service. Also remember that mistakes do happen, no one is perfect; use those occasions as teachable moments and strive to do better in the future. 🌿

### Showcase Your Knowledge

Know your stuff! Many floral customers know they want flowers, but may know little else. It is important as good customer service providers to help consumers make informed and appropriate choices. They may not know which floral traditions to follow or the appropriateness of their gift for an occasion and it is up to us to guide them. It also falls to us to be able to tell them the names of many flowers and plants, how to care

**Patrick Kelly is the owner of Stein Your Florist Co. in Philadelphia and Burlington, New Jersey. In addition to his family's business, he maintains a personal blog, [WakingUpWithPatrick.com](http://WakingUpWithPatrick.com), on meditation. [steinyourflorist@aol.com](mailto:steinyourflorist@aol.com)**



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## LOVELY LINES

> When a bride described her vision of “coastal sophistication” for her beachside wedding, the team at Botanica International Design Studio in Tampa, Florida, knew exactly how to pull together an aesthetic that was breezy, but upscale. They built an armature of driftwood, which held a rush of white Phalaenopsis orchids, draped with thick, creamy callas. “Callas are absolutely perfect when you want to achieve a simple look with architectural lines,” said Creative Director Zoë Gallina, AAF.

Callas’ unfussy structure belies the work that goes into them. “It’s definitely a difficult crop to grow,” said Tyler Meskers, vice president of Oregon Flowers in Aurora, Oregon. Tubers are expensive, must be kept very dry, then soaked, and monitored closely for erwinia, a fungus. “The postharvest requires diligence too,” he said. They call for strict sanitation, “and if you cut too far up the stem, they’ll roll up like a banana peel.” (For detailed care and handling tips, see p. 48.) Despite their challenges, callas are worth

the effort, insists Meskers, who started growing them to fill his company’s greenhouses during the summer, when demand dips for lilies. “Callas keep us productive during the slow season,” he

said. “It’s also been really rewarding to work with breeders who are passionate about creating the best possible varieties, then doing our part to bring high-quality products to market.” With proper TLC, he’s had some callas last for five weeks.

Lennaert Kapiteijn, the fourth-generation manager of the Kapiteyn Group in the Netherlands, is among those intent on refining callas. He concentrates on breeding flowers with sturdy stems, round shapes, strong colors, high production and a long vase life. Specimens that achieve these characteristics become part of the company’s “Captain Calla” line. “Only then does the process of testing, propagating and preparing begin,” he said. To promote success further along the supply chain, the company sends representatives to farms in the U.S., Canada, China, Colombia, Italy and Japan to train growers on callas’ proper care. 🌿

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**‘RED ALERT’**  
Dümmen Orange

**‘MORNING SUN’**  
Dümmen Orange



**‘CAPTAIN SAFARI’**  
Kitayama Brothers



**‘CAPTAIN MORELLI’**  
Kapiteyn





**'BEATRIX'**  
Dümmen Orange



**'GOLD MEDAL'**  
Dümmen Orange



**'BLACK DIAMOND'**  
Dümmen Orange



**'CAPTAIN CARRERA'**  
Kapiteyn



**'CAPTAIN PROMISE'**  
Kapiteyn



**'CAPTAIN VENTURA'**  
Kapiteyn



**'SAPPORO'**  
Kitayama Brothers



**'CAPTAIN SAMBA'**  
Kapiteyn



# FIND YOUR FINISH LINE

BUILD YOUR TEAM, IMPRESS CUSTOMERS AND KEEP PACE WITH TRENDS AT SAF AMELIA ISLAND 2019

BY MARY WESTBROOK

Sometimes, running a floral industry business can feel like racing through an obstacle course. Just when you get a steady team of employees, a key worker quits. As soon as you hit your groove with digital marketing, Facebook changes its algorithm. The minute you launch a service or product, a new competitor crops up. And then, of course, there are

those longtime obstacles that you never quite clear: the demands of providing outstanding service (every.single.day), the importance of e-commerce, fierce competition from *everywhere*, the need to stay relevant with customers and update and educate yourself. On and on and on. The bad news: We don't have all the answers. The really (really) good news: Roughly 60 experts and hundreds of your

peers will come together this September during SAF Amelia Island, the Society of American Florists' 135th annual convention, to talk best practices, solutions and to share information that you can put into practice right away to help ensure your business grows and thrives. Because for every hurdle or obstacle you face, there's an expert — or a trusted peer — ready to help you find and master your course.

ILLUSTRATIONS: ARCHETYPE/SHUTTERSTOCK & COLORATION: EL DORADO SUPERVECTOR/SHUTTERSTOCK





OSCAR FERNANDEZ



BARRY GOTTLIEB



HEATHER WAITS

### The Hurdle

Building and keeping a great team when unemployment is historically low and younger generations job hop like crazy.

### Pacesetters

Barry Gottlieb, Heather Waits, Oscar Fernandez

### Training Tactic

Zero in on onboarding. According to Equifax Workforce Solutions, **more than 40 percent of turnover happens within an employee's first month**; another 10 percent of workers leave before their first anniversary. Those disruptions sap your time, energy and team morale — and they can hurt sales and profits, too. Gottlieb, author and founder of Coaching the Winner's Edge, will lead a fast-paced panel discussion with industry members (representing businesses from different segments, both large and small) who have implemented successful onboarding programs.

Think that sounds too corporate-y for your freewheeling business? Waits of Bloomtastic in Columbus, Ohio, used to have a similar mindset. "Back in 2015, I nearly left the industry," she confessed. "I'd hired the wrong people, and they were draining me of my love for flowers. It took two years, but I created a **solid onboarding program that now sets new staff up to succeed in their position and lessens the stress on me.**" Today, Waits and her team rely on **standard operating procedures and key performance indicators** to ensure the team is working well together toward those common goals.

Five years ago, Fernandez, Equiflor's director of sales, had a similar realization: The Miami-based company needed to spend more time on those crucial first weeks after a new employee is hired. "We now have a very **extensive training program for each hire that lasts two weeks,**" he said. "Each person **trains in every department,** so that they understand what every department does, and how we all work together." Fernandez complements that training with **one-on-one meetings and lunches that don't involve managers** (so the new employee can talk candidly with their peers and ask questions they might otherwise feel too intimidated to broach). The company's onboarding process also gives managers time to **identify hiring mistakes.** "Someone can interview really well, and then when they hit the ground, they are just not what you thought they'd be," Fernandez said. "The training period gives us **immediate insight** into how they'll perform."

### Finish Line Swag

A more structured approach to employees' first weeks — and potentially, team members who stick around longer. That's no small thing. "There's a big expense to bringing in any new hire," Fernandez said, which is why that early period is critical. "**You want to give any new hire all the resources necessary to succeed.**" Waits agrees. "**Your staff want to learn and grow,**" she said. "They want to do a good job and make you happy."

## A COACH FOR EVERY CHALLENGE

The tips outlined in this story represent just a fraction of the information attendees will have access to during SAF Amelia Island. Over the course of the four-day event, dozens of speakers from inside and outside of the industry will be sharing their experiences, advice and perspectives on some of the biggest challenges your business is facing. Other highlights:

.....  
**Challenge:** You're overwhelmed with updates to algorithms and have no time to create a social media strategy.



**Coach:** Learn best practices in Instagram from Jackie Levine, a fourth-generation florist from Central Square Florist in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with a dedicated (and growing!) following online.

.....  
**Challenge:** Morale in your business is low and tension is running high.



**Coach:** Popular return speaker Glenna Hecht of Humanistic Consulting will talk about creating a drama-free workplace — and how to reboot a dysfunctional team.



# PLANNING FOR YOUR FUTURE



CLARA VARGA-GONZALES



SHIRLEY LYONS, AAF, PFCI



PAUL GOODMAN, CPA, MBA, PFCI

## The Hurdle

Setting yourself and your business up for the future you want — while you are simultaneously running that business.

**a buyer, or a lender, say, 'Wow! I want that business'?"** If you aren't at that

"wow factor" yet, no worries. The pair will also discuss how to get there, including how to handle a **physical refresh in-store** and ways to improve your **brand reputation** ahead of time.

## Pacesetters

Shirley Lyons, AAF, PFCI; Paul Goodman, CPA, MBA, PFCI; Clara Varga-Gonzales

In a separate session, Varga-Gonzales of Fleurish Consulting will reflect on the lessons she learned from running Tiger Lily, a successful, two-location flower shop in Charleston, South Carolina, that she and her husband, Manny, sold last year after owning the business for more than 20 years. Varga-Gonzales will talk candidly about the times the shop almost went out of business, and the dramatic changes they implemented to right their course — including overhauls to how they handled **branding, leadership and staffing**, and their **deep commitment to understanding, tracking and taking control of their financials**. "Numbers are not the sexy part of this business but failing to account for costs properly is the No. 1 reason a lot of us can't stay in business," she said. "We all know what our numbers should be, but what tools do we have to start the process of getting there?"

## Training Tactic

Clarify your goals — and start taking action. We know, we know: You love your business. You love this industry. (We do, too!) But one day in the future — whether it's five, 10 or 25 years from now — you're going to want to retire, or step back, or pass the business on to the next generation. To do that effectively and (ahem, relatively) seamlessly, the time to start planning is now, says Lyons, a former SAF president who will be joined by Goodman, a longtime industry accounting pro and Floral Management contributor, to talk best practices and practical strategies. "One of the important goals of business ownership is the **ability to pass it on or sell it and eventually retire**," said Lyons, who sold her longtime flower shop in Eugene, Oregon, last year. "In the busy day-to-day we put those thoughts on the back burner. We want to **give owners ideas and tools to make that eventual day easier and the sale more profitable**." Lyons and Goodman will dip into practical tips, including **how to value your business** and the steps you should take to **get your financial statements in order**, along with advice on **organizing processes and paperwork** to make for a smooth handoff. "You have to put on your buyer's hat," Lyons said. "**What would make you as**

## Finish Line Swag

A plan on how to get your business and yourself in shape for the next phase — and in a better position today. "The nice thing about getting your business ready for sale is that, done right, it will become a very **profitable business in the interim**," Goodman added. "It will become a business that runs smoothly and is a joy to work at and manage."

**Challenge:** You feel under attack with bad reviews on Yelp and Google — and have no clue how to turn those negative experiences around.



**Coach:** Sam Bowles will share ideas on how to protect your brand and deliver outstanding customer experiences, based on

his time coaching flower shops for Floral Strategies LLC and his personal experience as the manager of Allen's Flowers in San Diego.

**Challenge:** You want to grow into high-volume fulfillment — but you don't know how to do so profitably.



**Coach:** Skip Paal, AAF, and the team from Rutland Beard Floral Group, in Maryland and New Jersey, will walk you through the steps of this business model — and talk about the

factors to consider before moving into the space.





DUSTIN GARIS



SALLY KOBYLINSKI



JODI MCSHAN

# EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

## The Hurdle

How can the floral industry capitalize on the radical consumer mind shift — from buying products to investing in experiences — and get more customers buying more flowers more often?

## Pacesetters

Dustin Garis, Jodi McShan, Sally Kobylinski

## Training Tactic

Think bigger. Garis, a consultant who has worked with multinational corporations including Procter & Gamble and Coca-Cola, takes issue with anyone who says brick-and-mortar retail is dead. As evidence, he points to a grilled cheese sandwich. "I was at this small restaurant not long ago and grilled cheese is all that they do, but these aren't your normal sandwiches," he explained. "You can pick from a range of really wild ingredients — doughnuts instead of bread! — and then they'll create this special sandwich, exactly as you imagined it, just for you." Try getting that ooey-goey goodness from Amazon. Garis argues the floral industry is especially well suited to capitalize on this new focus on **experiences over products** ... *if* individual business owners start thinking bigger about the case they're making to customers. "This is a powerful trend and a chance to **reposition flowers from an occasion product to an everyday experience** people crave," he said. "Florists need to think more broadly about that experience of giving and receiving flowers and how they can **craft, accelerate or redefine that experience**. When you figure out how to do that, it's a fantastic service to monetize."

In a separate panel, McShan, of McShan Florist in Dallas, and Kobylinski, of In Bloom Florist in Orlando, Florida, will give real-world florists' perspectives on how they use experiential marketing to grow their businesses. "**Offering people experiences gives us a reason to exist**," said McShan, noting that her shop's Christmastime events draw hundreds, in part because McShan's team works hard to offer something new every year. "It's something competitors who only sell flowers can't do." Kobylinski takes a similar approach. "We can give our community the ability to interact directly with our products, which sets us apart from other retailers," said Kobylinski, who has hosted **in-store workshops**, turned the shop into a **venue for speakers**, hosted **pop ups** and played a lead role in **organizing customers and neighboring businesses** for charitable causes.

## Finish Line Swag

Ideas galore and a new way of thinking about the services you offer. Garis argues that consumers' clear interest in experiences proves that some facets of human nature haven't changed, and that's good news for the industry. "At our core, **we are still social creatures**," he said. "We used to gather around the fire, or in front of the radio. Now people also gather around digital devices or in digital spaces. But most people still aspire to the same things: **a memorable life, meaningful connections**." When you help people create those things — and show them the role flowers can play in making them happen — your customers remember, he added.

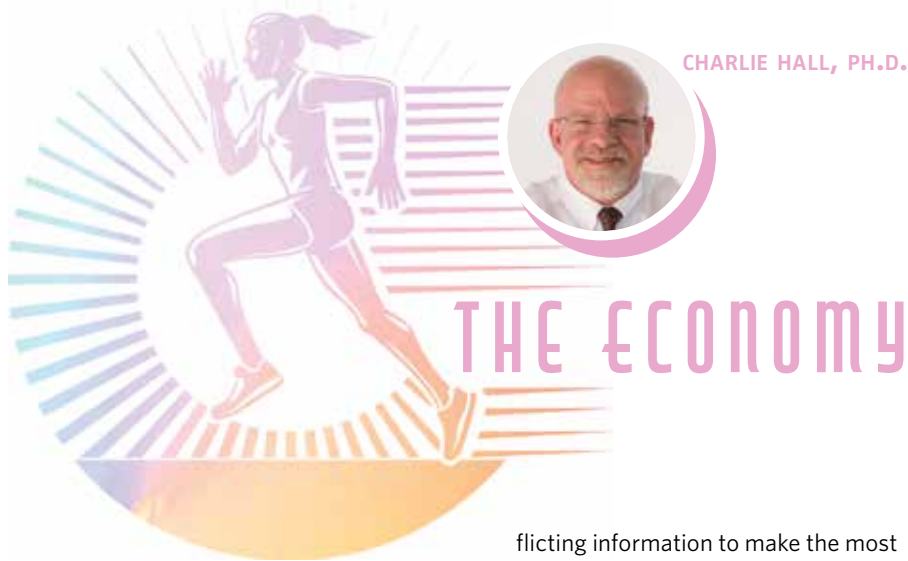
**Challenge:** You're ready to dip your toes into something non-floral — say, prop rentals — but you could use a mentor (or two or three) before you get started.

**Coach:** Zoë Gallina of Botanica International in Tampa will be joined by other industry panelists to talk about the successful ways they've discovered additional revenue streams.



.....  
Head to [safnow.org](http://safnow.org) for a full listing of convention programming, including information on experience zones (for quick tips on practical topics), peer-to-peer roundtable discussions, new book club sessions, and much-loved convention staples such as SAF's Outstanding Varieties Competition, Supplier Expo and Premier Products Showcase, and the 51st annual Sylvia Cup Design Competition.

—M.W.



CHARLIE HALL, PH.D.

**The Hurdle**

The U.S. economy is strong now — but how do you prep for the future?

**Pacesetter**

Charlie Hall, Ph.D.

**Training Tactic**

Learn what you need and then stay focused. Short of a crystal ball, SAF’s conventions are the best place to learn about and discuss economic trends that affect every industry segment. Hall, professor and Ellison Chair at the Department of Horticultural Sciences at Texas A&M, will walk attendees through some of the leading economic indicators and how to examine sometimes con-

flicting information to make the most informed decisions possible. “The most common mistake is that business owners in the industry let the mainstream media shape the strategic vision of their firm,” he said. “I always tell folks to pay attention to what experts are saying, but don’t just take their word for it. Some basic knowledge about key topics such as **consumer confidence, the jobs report, interest rates, housing starts, trade, and immigration** can go a long way in knowing what is really going on.” As for a question Hall fields often — “When will the next recession take place?” — Hall said a better query might be, “What can I do now to get ready for the next downturn?” (A downturn that is inevitable at some point, as Hall pointed out.) “Most businesses, in the floral sup-

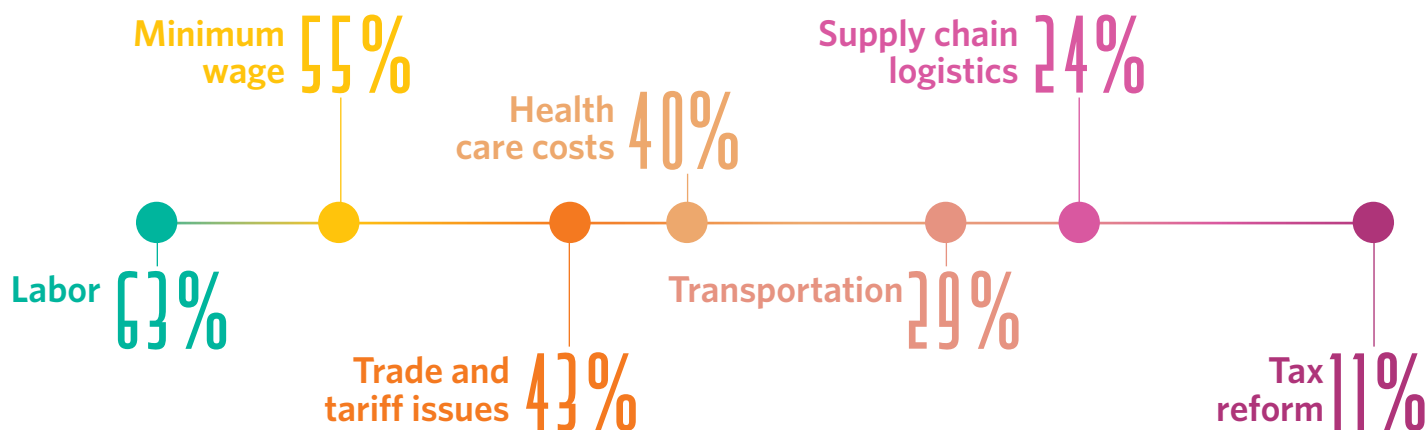
ply chain that struggled or were forced out of the industry after the last recession, did so because they were **over-leveraged** and the bank had more skin in their business than they did, or because they were **managing their working capital incorrectly**,” Hall said. “They also were not conveying their **value proposition** to their customer base. Make sure your business is addressing these three areas and you will go a long way in recession-proofing your business.”

**Finish Line Swag**

More peace of mind, and a greater understanding of economic forces that affect your customers and your business every day. “In practicality, all of us are amateur economists in that we **make decisions every day on how to allocate our hard-earned dollars when we spend**,” Hall said. “In a sense, we are voting to keep those businesses alive — those we don’t shop at, not so much. The economy affects those decisions by influencing our thought processes about risk and uncertainty. Sometimes we are aware of those cognitive responses, but often they subconsciously influence our spending — so **the ‘economic state’ of our minds at the time of purchases is critically important.**”

# KEY ECONOMIC ISSUES AMONG SAF MEMBERS

SOURCE: SAF ECONOMIC OUTLOOK SURVEY (JANUARY 2019)





DEREK WOODRUFF, AIFD, PFCI



## DESIGN TRENDS

### The Hurdle

Customers who spend hours on Instagram want the latest and greatest in design. How can you clear the field and position yourself as their go-to expert?

### Pacesetter

Derek Woodruff, AIFD, PFCI

### Training Tactic

Get deep into trends. "Show, don't tell," is the mantra Woodruff, owner of Floral Underground in Traverse City, Michigan, plans to use when he presents trends and ideas from the International Floral Distributors' Flower Trends Forecast. "I'm a practical designer — I'm not only studying trends every day, I'm actually **putting them to use with real customers, with real money on the line,**" said Woodruff, a former SAF Sylvia Cup Design competition champion. "So, when I talk about the trends we're seeing, I'm going to be talking about how to actually **use those trends in your business to increase customer engagement.**" Woodruff's presentation

will focus primarily on **weddings and events**, because "what happens in those spaces, design-wise, tends to trickle down," he explained. (One trend he can share ahead of time: "**Dried botanicals**, incorporated into designs of all kinds, are going to be huge in your market, if they aren't already," he said.) The biggest shift Woodruff sees, though, is **how trends move through the market.** "It used to be that big companies set the pace, but now, often because of social media, it's a reverse dynamic: **Consumers are the ones driving trends.** They're telling us what they want to buy."

### Finish Line Swag

The confidence and info you need to present yourself as an expert to customers. If you're thinking that design trends are a soft topic — the kind of thing your designers chat about while on break — think again, Woodruff said. **Having a modern aesthetic and knowing what your customers want, before they know it themselves, will set your business apart** in ways that show up on your balance sheet. "You can't get complacent or comfortable about these things, or the rug will be pulled out from underneath you," he cautioned. "**Brick-and-mortar florists who are surviving today are staying on top of trends related to design, consumer buying habits and consumer wants and needs.** You always need this information." 🌿

**Mary Westbrook** is the editor in chief of Floral Management. [mwestbrook@safnow.org](mailto:mwestbrook@safnow.org)

## SAF TODAY

### A NEW VISION, A STRONGER FUTURE



KATE PENN,  
SAF CEO

In August 2018, the Society of American Florists began an existential journey, embarking on a transformation that challenged the association's board of directors and staff to answer fundamental questions such as: Why does SAF exist and why should anyone care? What role must SAF play in the floral industry? What problem is SAF uniquely positioned to solve, and for whom?

Since that time — and with guidance from a third party with extensive experience in strategic planning — the SAF team and its dedicated volunteer leaders have done a deep dive into some of the key challenges facing the floral industry, and we've asked tough questions about how we can best provide thoughtful, effective solutions. We've also engaged in one-on-one interviews, surveyed our members and sought answers and examples outside of the industry.

The result: One year later, SAF has a bold mission and vision that unifies and energizes the organization and our industry and positions SAF as the provider of indispensable value to its members. During SAF Amelia Island 2019, SAF CEO Kate Penn will talk more about the journey SAF undertook and — most important — the exciting new places the association and its members are heading.

—M.W.

### GO DEEPER

 SAF  
**Amelia Island**  
**2019** Sept. 18-21  
**135<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION**

SAF Amelia Island 2019 takes place September 18-21 at the Ritz-Carlton Amelia Island. Early Bird registration ends Aug. 23. Find out more at [safnow.org/annual-convention](http://safnow.org/annual-convention).



# Just-in-Time Tulips

BY BRUCE WRIGHT

*Budget-friendly and always in style, tulips are increasingly a year-round option for florists.*

**L**conic in form, tulips are one of the few flowers that almost anyone can recognize and name. Adding to their universal appeal, they are available at low price points and are virtually self-arranging: Plop a bunch of them into a vase, and they will find their own way into acrobatic, graceful and vibrant bouquets.

SUNNY\_BABY/SHUTTERSTOCK



These qualities — especially the price — make standard tulips popular with retailers of all stripes, including mass marketers. But florists know there are more than just off-the-rack varieties. You can keep heads turning with parrot and peony tulips, fringed and lily-flowering varieties. Or you can wow your customers with “French” tulips, grown exclusively in warm, sunny regions like the south of France (or southern California), with their long and sinuous stems that give a couture look.

Tulips are strongly linked to spring, yet they are capable of adapting nimbly to year-round supply. Red and white tulips at Christmas time, pink and yellow tulips in the spring, orange tulips in autumn? Right now, tulips are available in a wide selection, perfect for summer sales, from California growers and others across the country.

How do they always seem to be just where you need them, exactly when you need them? How can a flower defy the seasons and still be affordable? The credit goes to nature’s little battery pack: the bulb.

## Ready, Set, Bloom

Botanical historians think that flower bulbs evolved when the Earth’s climate was getting colder — and when the warm season, when plants are able to grow and flower, was getting shorter.

Flower bulbs are designed to store energy during the winter. When spring arrives, they have already started preparing to bloom. Slice open a tulip bulb and you may be able to see the flower in embryo — petals, stamens, and pistil — surrounded by the fleshy “scales” that provide quick nourishment.

In nature, tulips stand ready to trumpet spring’s arrival with their speedy flowering. In a greenhouse, the same quick flowering period — usually only three weeks — accounts for why tulips cost less than many other cut flowers.

The key to both quick flowering and cost savings is the bulb. It’s a storage unit, but also a living plant; it requires not only expert cultivation but also careful preparation for blooming. The techniques used in growing tulip bulbs are of course important to the quality of the cut flowers. But so is the time in between: first a warm period, when the flower inside the bulb develops, then a cold period.

In the modern world of commercial floriculture, the cold period can vary as to temperature and duration, depending on the target date for flowering, location and growing technique. This in-between time must be handled with precision and with specialized equipment. It very often falls, not to the bulb producer, nor to the cut-flower grower, but to a Dutch exporter of flower bulbs.

## The Delicate Dutch Handoff

Wherever tulips are grown, chances are good that the bulbs came from Holland. Dutch exporters are key actors in the tulip market, providing a varied selection along with quality assurance.

So how do tulip growers in California and elsewhere find the perfect partner to care for and ferry their precious cargo? Enter the annual Tulip Trade Event. Held in mid March, the event offers a coordinated opportunity for tulip growers around the world to connect with their suppliers — the exporters. Often the exporters started out as flower-bulb producers, three or four generations ago. As the market evolved, some producers began to specialize in bulb preparation and export. So it’s natural that they are clustered in Holland’s prime tulip-growing regions, west and north of Amsterdam.

At this year’s Tulip Trade Event, a dozen tulip-bulb exporters opened their doors to visitors. Each offered displays awash with colorful blooms. But make no mistake: It’s all about the bulbs.

An exporter may also cultivate tulip bulbs. But typically, exporters buy the bulbs from producers in Holland and elsewhere. Part of their function is to create a wide-ranging assortment that allows cut-flower growers to buy all the bulbs from one source.

## Quality Control

Exporters do much more than buy and sell. When a batch of tulip bulbs is purchased, samples may be examined under a microscope to determine the stage of development, the earliest possible flowering date, and the necessary cooling treatment. At a later stage, bulbs are cleaned and graded for export.

At Jan de Wit en Zonen B.V. — one of the leading Dutch exporters — every bulb is X-rayed prior to export to check for disease. Samples of each shipment are kept behind, “to see the growing result at our own site,” said Jan de Wit, grandson of the company founder. “If our customer has any kind of problem, we can check if we have the same problem here. It’s a very important reference, and at the same time for us a good study to check the varieties and make improvements.”

**A PERFECT PACKAGE** Tulip bulbs hold the key to cut-flower quality.







### Trust, But Inspect

Anyone who's watched a gorgeous flower die within days of receiving it knows how difficult it can be to predict performance in the vase — unless you have confidence in your suppliers. With tulip bulbs, reputation plays an even bigger role than usual. "We sell the bulbs, but the customer is not interested in the bulbs," said De Wit. "He's interested in the flower that he can grow out of the bulb, and that's different. What we sell is not a finished product; it's a half-product. That's why trust is a very big point in our business."

The quality of flower bulbs coming out of the Netherlands is regulated by FBIS, the Dutch Flower Bulb Inspection Service. Depending on the exporter's record, the service inspects 25 percent, 50 percent, or as much as 100 percent of bulbs exported — with a correlative increase in costs, since the inspection is required, but not free.

So, quality assurance adds a little to the cost of bulbs and, down the line, of tulips. Other special cost factors enter in,

related to the nature of the bulb. It takes between 20 and 25 years for breeders to create new varieties with tulips — much longer than with most other flowers. That's because, even though tulips reproduce most efficiently via division of the bulbs, breeding must be done with tulip seeds. Then, when a new variety looks promising, it takes many years of testing and bulb division to produce enough bulbs for that variety to go on the market.

A bad year for tulip bulbs (a late freeze, for example) can affect the supply, not just for that year, but for the following year as well. And for cut-flower growers, while tulips might shoot up quickly, it doesn't mean they are an easy crop. Flower farmers who grow tulips have to be on their game, because, as Hans Jong of Dutch exporter P. Aker points out, "A tulip doesn't need its flower to survive and reproduce. So if conditions are not perfect, the first thing it drops is the flower. That means, when you want a beautiful flower all the conditions should be good."

### GO DEEPER

Get tips and advice on designing with tulips — including how to deal with "tulip droop"— and read about the history of "Tulip Mania" (a story made to share with your customers and staff) at [safnow.org/moreonline](https://safnow.org/moreonline).



In spite of all these challenges, the price of tulip bulbs has been stable for 50 years, thanks to Dutch innovation and initiative, according to Bonne Boots of exporter Boots Flowerbulbs B.V. Only in the last few years, he says, have prices risen slightly, because of an increase in demand and a temporary shortage in supply.

Naturally, costs for the bulb producers and preparers go up (energy, labor), but they have been able to keep prices low by realizing efficiencies in production. "When my father was growing tulip bulbs with his brothers, it was all mainly done by hand," said Boots. "They had 60 or 70 workers during the harvest, and they could do about one acre a day. Now they do it with just three or four people and they can do three acres in a day."

### What's Your Tulip Type?

As beloved, traditional, and familiar as daisies, tulips may not be as trend-sensitive as some other flowers. Over the past 30 years or more, tulip production has scaled up to meet the demands of the mass market, where breeding and variety selection are often geared more to the needs of growers, shippers and traders than responsive to the whims of fashion.

Ask a Dutch exporter about trends in tulip varieties and they will mostly cite broad color preferences that vary by country. Japan loves pink; China loves red and gold, as in the popular variety 'World's Favorite.' Most European countries want a selection of standard, solid colors: white, red, yellow, pink, purple.

When it comes to form, "Dutch growers want tulips with the bud enclosed within the tips of the leaves," said Jong. "The leaves should be straight and not too wide." He's describing a tulip that lends itself to automated bunching and handling, which explains why this look is favored by growers and sellers. It's a look that is well accepted by Dutch consumers, said Jong — perhaps because, as tulip connoisseurs, they know that as the bud opens, the stem will continue to grow until the flower pokes above the leaves.

**PRODUCT PREVIEW** Every year in March, Dutch tulip-bulb producers and exporters meet with their customers: tulip growers from around the world — at the Tulip Trade Event (far left). They are there to buy and sell tulip bulbs — but it's the blooms that are on glorious display.



MONTE ORANGE; BOB FLOWERBULBS



APRICOT MAGIC; JAN DE WIT



DONATO; BOTFLOWERBULBS

Consumers in other markets prefer to buy tulips with bigger heads that already extend above the tips of the leaves at the time of sale. This is a feature that is partly a function of maturity, but also partly variety-specific.

The German growers want bulbs that will produce double tulips — accounting for as much as 70 percent of total sales in that country, says Jong. Along with bigger flower heads, however, the doubles are more likely to have wide, curling leaves. Both of these features pose problems for automated handling. However, the doubles are in demand with German consumers. Smaller producers can work more easily with such varieties because they do more things by hand.

And doubles are growing in popularity worldwide — particularly the large, rounded, fully double varieties called peony-flowering tulips. These can fetch a higher price as cut flowers, but the bulbs also must be large (and therefore more expensive), and they can be more difficult to grow, so the higher price is justified. The peony-flowering doubles are tulips sold more often in boutique flower shops than in the mass market.

### Couture Care

Doubles aren't the only fancy tulips that are likely to cost more than standards; the same is true of parrots, fringed tulips, and other specialties. For producers, they may require special handling; in the shop and in the vase, however, these eye-catching flowers generally perform well, right along with their plainer sisters. Often a fringed or double tulip is a mutation of a standard tulip that carries with it the strength of the original. 'Cabanna', for example, with ruffled edges like a parrot tulip, is a variant of 'First Class', a reliable standard tulip with white petals tipped in vibrant pink. 'Polar Bear' is a pure white mutation of 'First Class'.



NORTH POLE; P. AKER



DOUBLE TWIST; BOTFLOWERBULBS

**FINE AND FANCY** Every floral retailer needs standard tulips in inventory. But fancies are the natural domain of full-service and boutique florists: doubles, including ball-shaped peony-flowering varieties, fringed or crisa and lily-flowering tulips, and feather-edged parrots.





WHITE LIBERSTAR; BOT FLOWERBULBS

While the exotic, specialty varieties are a florist's natural, exclusive domain, all types of tulips have a place in the flower-shop inventory — from parrots and peony-flowering doubles to the humble, oh-so-affordable pick-me-up bunch, tricked out with a florist touch like wired ribbon or a suitable vase. With their trademark foliage and satiny sheen, tulips can evoke the freshness of spring flowers all year long. 🌷

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While fringed tulips (also called *crispa*) are increasing on the market, the lily-flowering types are still rather few. They tend to have small flowers, according to Nico de Wit, one of the company directors at Jan de Wit en Zonen B.V. But the shape is distinctive! 'White Liberstar' is one of the most successful introductions.

Parrot tulips, with their extravagant stripes and scalloped, feather-edged petals, can vary in availability from one year to the next — another byproduct of the bulb market. Since parrots tend to flower late in the natural season, that means the bulbs also mature later than other tulip varieties. In a year when demand for bulbs is low, parrots are among the first to feel the brunt of lost sales.

### Like a Fine Wine

Just as a vintner in California or Oregon seeks out terrain to mimic European climates, long-stemmed, so-called "French" tulips rely on the plentiful light of Mediterranean and other southern growing regions to reach their luxurious height. But the varieties must also be well suited to the special growing techniques used to produce these elegant beauties, with thick, strong stems and flower heads that are in proportion, yet not too heavy. In California, Sun Valley's Redwood Grove collection of long-stemmed tulips is aptly named for the tall trees that grow in the northern part of the state. The flowers, however, are cultivated in Sun Valley's southern California location.



SAMBUCA; BOT FLOWERBULBS

EDITORS' NOTE *Paul Goodman, MBA, CPA, PFCI, and Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI, love a good financial management challenge, however big or small. Send your questions to [fmeditor@safnow.org](mailto:fmeditor@safnow.org), and we'll challenge the experts to tackle them in an upcoming article.*



ILLUSTRATIONS: QUARTA / SHUTTERSTOCK & COLORATION; YELLOW STOCKING / SHUTTERSTOCK

# STOP THE SHRINK

**Shrink can be a big problem to a shop's profitability. Here's how to stop it.**

BY PAUL GOODMAN, MBA, CPA, PFCI

**I hear a variation of this question a lot.** "Shrink? Come again? What is that and why is it important?"

Shrink happens when flowers or other products go out of your shop without a customer paying for them. The causes are myriad: Theft and breakage account for some shrink, but it can also happen when you throw flowers away or designers add extra stems to designs, which is called stuffing. In other words, you bought the products but never sold them. The result was wasted dollars, or from an accounting point of view, your Cost of Goods Sold (COGS) was higher than it should have been. That's a problem.



## Quick Solutions for Shrink

From a management perspective, most florists can quickly reduce theft and breakage. For one thing, it's very difficult for customers to steal your flowers; they're a bit awkward to carry out unnoticed. Of course, you could have an employee stealing flowers out the back door — but in my experience, that scenario is rare, and it's one you can deal with quickly.

Breakage happens in the design process and occasionally during delivery. Flowers are a perishable, delicate product and so some breakage is expected and just needs to be planned for in your pricing. I recommend you add 10 percent to the total cost of your perishable products before marking them up. That should more than handle the extra cost of this "legitimate" shrink.

## Bigger Challenges

Of the remaining two culprits, the easiest to handle is product that's thrown away. First, you need to figure out why good product is ending up in the trash bin.

The first and probably biggest cause is that you and your team are buying more product than you can sell. The flowers simply get too old to give customers good shelf life, so you end up tossing them. The solution is straightforward: Don't buy so much product. It sounds simple; however, you actually need a bit of data to make wise purchase decisions.

Most flower shops have about the same volume of sales during their 10.5 to 11 months of nonholiday sales. The exception is that January and July are usually a bit slower. So you will have to take three or four consecutive non-holiday weeks and analyze how much perishable product you sold, including both arrangements and loose flowers. Don't include weddings or other planned events because they are usually bought for separately.

Take the average weekly volume, and if you use standing orders, plan on purchasing no more than 85 percent of that volume from standing orders. Use your wholesaler as the buffer to buy the extra you need, when you need it.

The second problem arises from arrangements designed for the sales

cooler that sit too long without being sold. For this scenario, data again comes to the rescue. I suggest you track your cooler sales for a couple weeks and get a solid idea of how much product is sold. Smart florists use cooler arrangements to fill wire orders when they fit the request. Just plan and limit the cooler arrangements to what experience says you will sell or use to fill orders.

A third but smaller problem is flowers that do not get care and need to be thrown away before they are used. Clean buckets and good care procedures should fix this. (The Quality column in *Floral Management*, p. 48, is a great primer each month; you can access back issues of that column at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).)

It's also a good idea to track which flower or designs are thrown away. Simply set up a form that shows four things:

- Date
- Product type
- Retail price
- Team member who threw out the product

Review the forms weekly with key staff members to see what's being tossed and who did the tossing. If it looks like there's a problem with too much being tossed, you can use the information to address the problem and fix it.

## Say No to Stuffing

Here's the elephant in the design room. Most flowers are simply given away to customers by adding extra stems into arrangements. The impulse itself is understandable, even commendable: Your designers want to make an arrangement special, so they add three, four or five extra stems. But that's an expensive, bad habit.

To break this habit, you'll need your design team's cooperation. Their goal, to make a pretty arrangement, may not be consistent with your goal to make a profit. You have to find a way to marry both.

There are two things you can do to stop those extra flowers from leaving the shop. The first approach is centered on counting. Every stem, including foliage, needs to be counted and a customer must be charged for them. Standard

recipe arrangements help a lot in achieving this approach. You and your team create recipes to fit the retail price. All the designer needs to do is copy the recipe (and not add extra flowers). The larger your shop, the more you should use standard recipe arrangements, both to control COGS and to increase designer productivity.

The second thing you can do is to set up an incentive program that puts the designers on your side. The target for flowers and greens cost should be 25 percent of the retail price of your arrangement sales. Give your designers a weekly bonus when they hit that target. Track your weekly purchases (minus any purchases for weddings or events) and use a product sales report from your POS to total your arrangement sales. See if those purchases are 25 percent or less of the arrangement sales.

What about loose flower sales? You certainly don't want to separately track fresh purchases that end up in loose flower sales. The easy way around that is to take your total loose flower sales and calculate the flower/green cost by using your pricing formula for loose flowers. (Example: If you use a three times markup, your cost would be 33.3 percent of the retail price.) Then subtract that number from your purchases. You also do not want to include fresh product purchases for weddings or events.

Give each of your designers a \$20 to \$50 cash bonus each week (depending on designer productivity) when the target is reached. You will be amazed at how quickly a little extra cash will bring the designers to your way of thinking. Of course, when they don't hit the target, don't give the bonus. A little "stick" helps once in a while.

Don't forget those cash bonuses need to go through the payroll for tax purposes. Simply add their bonuses to their pay and then subtract the appropriate "cash advance" from the net check. It's easy and makes everything legal. 🌿

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## FTD FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY PROTECTION

> FTD announced in June that it had filed for chapter 11 bankruptcy protection and entered into a purchase agreement with Nexus Capital Management LP, a Los Angeles-based investment firm with a history of buying distressed companies.

The news comes after months of corporate restructuring at the company — a process that is still ongoing — and growing speculation among growers, wholesalers, retailers, suppliers and the media about the future of one of the floral industry's oldest and most recognized brands.

The deal with Nexus Capital encompasses FTD's florist and consumer businesses, including ProFlowers. In addition, FTD has agreed to sell certain other assets, including its non-floral brands Personal Creations and Shari's Berries. The company has already sold the UK-based Interflora to Teleflora.

In an email to member florists, Scott Levin, FTD's president and CEO, sought to reassure people unsettled by the news. "I want to be clear about what this means," he wrote. "[Chapter 11] is a legal process that provides us the tools to implement our strategic initiatives and protect our important relationships while we continue operating."

FTD, which was founded in 1910, implemented a corporate restructuring and cost-savings plan last year in large part to address a \$217.7 million debt that comes to maturation in September. The company's disappointing results on Valentine's Day and lower-than-expected sales for the fourth quarter of 2018 compounded its problems, and created public relations challenges, as some publications predicted the company

would be out of business by this month — news stories Tom Moeller, executive vice president of the florist division at FTD, called "distortions" of the facts.



Tom Moeller, FTD's executive vice president, florist division

### Repositioning ProFlowers

In its communications with member florists, FTD has emphasized a number of points, including its planned restructuring of ProFlowers from a "drop-ship operation focused on value-priced flowers to a business model that leads with FTD florist designed and delivered offerings."

ProFlowers was once a fierce competitor of FTD. The company, which relied not only on drop shipments of boxed flowers but also, in its early days, on ads that disparaged local florists, was seen by many in the industry as a negative force, a business that built up consumer expectations with low-priced offerings but ultimately delivered sub-par experiences and products. FTD's decision to purchase the company in 2014 was viewed in some quarters as a way to rein in a renegade business — and in others as proof that FTD was moving further from its local florist members and roots.

Moeller said the new changes to ProFlowers — flipping the model from mostly drop-shipped to mostly florist designed and delivered, and eliminating TV and radio ads that promote ProFlowers' low-cost, drop-ship bouquets — will "be huge" for those member florists "that have the capability, quality and the desire to fill more incoming orders." The changes, he promised, "will result in hundreds of thousands of additional incremental orders into the FTD florist network annually."

Moeller acknowledged that the company's current financial position has forced it to reckon with the ProFlowers model. "When we acquired ProFlowers in 2014, it was a growing, big brand [and] somewhat disruptive," he said. Today, with new other startups in the industry working off a drop-ship model, "The value proposition isn't as strong as it used to be. To address our debt, we realized we'd have to sell it or change the model."

He also acknowledged that filling incoming orders isn't a model for all florists and pointed to other company resources, including its web-hosting and POS capabilities as valued services and products. FTD launched its new florist websites in mid June, according to a



**CORPORATE CHANGES** FTD purchased ProFlowers in 2014, a transaction Floral Management detailed in a cover story. The company now plans to "flip" the model of ProFlowers, with more florist designed and delivered arrangements.

company representative, who said the sites will offer improved functionality and more customization — updates many florists have said in the past are overdue. In addition, the company is finalizing an agreement with a third party to provide cloud-based POS technology.

### Addressing Payment Worries

FTD executives have sought to reassure florists that they will be paid for orders as the company moves through chapter 11 and continues its restructuring process, and that business will run as usual. No additional changes have been announced at the leadership level.

Moeller added that the team at FTD is focused on the future, and he pointed to a new partnership with Legacy.com for "high-value, florist-filled sympathy orders" and year-over-year growth in ProFlowers' Florist Express orders, along with strong year-to-date performance in FTD florist and consumer businesses.

"We experienced order growth for the first time in a while on FTD.com for Mother's Day, which benefits florists since the vast majority of orders are florist-filled," he said. "We have a lot of momentum and going forward into the



future, the restructure of ProFlowers.com to higher value, florist-filled products will continue to drive more orders into the network.”

### The Future of FTD?

At Polites Flores, in Springfield and Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, Chris Polites said the news didn't surprise him. The shop has been a member of FTD since the 1930s, and Polites has worked closely with the FTD in recent years to find solutions that better fit his business. (For instance, limiting his delivery range for incoming orders.)

He said that while the company has made missteps in recent years — he pointed to the purchase of ProFlowers and the fact that FTD fell behind on website technology as examples — he thinks “in the long run, if they can return to their core model, florists, they should be fine.”

“They lost track of who they were for a while,” he said. “But there are a lot of good people still working for the company, and they still have one of the best [POS] systems in the industry. I think they can turn things around.”

Elton Soriano of The Flower Factory in Tarzana, California, and a member of FTD for 25 years, said that like Polites, he is happy to hear the company is returning to its “heritage and member florists’ interests.”

“I feel positively about this [news] and about the fact that they are looking at their core business,” he said.

Rakini Chinery of Allan's Flowers & More in Prescott, Arizona, said, for her, the FTD news underscores a reality throughout the industry: Businesses that want to survive must adapt.

“I feel like FTD did not change soon enough, and instead they just tried to steamroll through,” said Chinery, a member of SAF's Retailers Council who discontinued her longtime FTD affiliation more than a year ago. “For me, it really speaks to what has happened and what continues to happen in the industry — the rate of change and the decisions we all have to make. Businesses have to be willing to adapt and think outside the box. I don't think FTD has done that.”

## SPRING HOLIDAY OVERVIEW

Mother's Day 2019 proved to be another strong holiday for the floral industry, with 62 percent of retailer respondents to a Society of American Florists post-holiday survey saying sales were higher than their 2018 returns. The survey results also highlighted a trend in last-minute ordering and showed an upward curve in average transactions. Find out more about those survey results at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).



LEBAVALERAB9/SHUTTERSTOCK

SAF President-Elect Chris Drummond, AAF, PFCI, of Penny's by Plaza Flowers in Philadelphia said he gives credit to FTD for finding a buyer, proactively communicating with florists and investors, and restructuring ProFlowers.

“To get cash for their non-core business and to focus on their core business, in my opinion, that's a smart way to go,” he said. Given the company's disappointing financial filing in March, “I think this is the best interim position that FTD could be in,” he added. “The question now is, how will they execute? Is their marketing smart? Are they generating business? How will consumers respond?”

Tim Galea of Norton's Flowers & Gifts, with locations in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, Michigan, and the chairman of SAF's Retailers Council agreed that many questions remain unanswered.

“They have a commitment from their buyers, but the question will be, how committed are these buyers to florists?” said Galea, who maintains an FTD membership but said those orders represent less than half a percentage point of volume at his stores. “Is there a synergy between those new owners and the executives at FTD? If there's not, I think industry confidence in FTD will continue to disintegrate — more than it has already.”

For his part, Moeller said he believes the teams will work well together. “Nexus is a private-equity company and values the management and associates within the organization to run the day-to-day business,” he said. “They also value and understand the importance of the relationship with the member florists.”

**Mary Westbrook** is the editor in chief of *Floral Management*. [mwestbrook@safnow.org](mailto:mwestbrook@safnow.org)



**LOCAL APPEALS**

LynnVale Studios is a boutique grower specializing in unique varieties that appeal to artisanal designers.

## A FARMER-FLORIST BLOOMS

> At the Gagnon family farm in Gainesville, Virginia, flowers paint fields with brushstrokes of living color. Andrea Gagnon, farmer-florist and designer, tends the blossoms with loving care. “I get excited to grow for other people,” she said. “As soon as I took my first celosia to market and had that direct experience of someone buying something I grew and nurtured, it was incredible.”

She raises flowers on a farm that’s been in her husband Lou’s family for eight generations. The Gagnons returned to the farm in 2002 to give their children the experience of family history and growing up in a multigenerational environment. Before heading back to their roots, the family lived in Los Angeles.

“Before our move, I was a stay-at-home mom with two young children, and Lou’s next job demanded a commute to Hong Kong,” said Gagnon, who has served as treasurer of the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers and hosted a Field to Vase Dinner, sponsored by Certified American Grown. “We knew it was the right time to try moving back home, that we could always recover from it if needed. We ended up loving it.”

### Design-Driven Product Mix

The Gagnons focus on local customers, so the fields at LynnVale Studios feature plants that don’t ship well. “We grow things that aren’t necessarily being grown commercially in large quantities, things that are super delicate and easily bruised when packaged,” Gagnon said. That list includes mints, basil, dahlia, sweetpea and baptisia.

Gagnon offers her design customers “foliage and texture, plants

that elevate a design and take it to the next level. When they order, they don’t necessarily ask for specific varieties,” Gagnon explained. “They request things like ‘\$500 of movement that will be worked into garlands.’ That’s where my design and architecture background kick in and I fill those orders with plants that tick the boxes.”

Foraged foliage is a key segment of LynnVale’s product line. “We have relationships with large landowners who allow us access to their properties, which have substantial plantings of things like thorny olive, boxwood, privet or mulberry,” Gagnon said. “The foraged foliage offers texture and seasonal interest, things that are only available for maybe a week or two. It can really set a design apart.”

One-third of LynnVale crops go to consumers at two northern Virginia/D.C. farmers’ markets. The remaining two-thirds supply LynnVale wedding and special event work or wholesale to a curated list of designers. Each channel fits into Gagnon’s philosophy of life on the farm. “Life here is about authenticity and relationships,” she said. “I’m really energized and interested in people who want to create that sense of connection and relationship with their art, whatever they’re doing.”

Gagnon’s style of doing business doesn’t fit every floral designer. “Some designers want 25 stems of this variety or 50 of a specific color. As a designer and farmer-florist, I prefer a more open conversation,” she said. “I aim to complement what’s out there in the wholesale world, not replicate it.”



### QUICK TAKE

**The company:** LynnVale Studios

**Product:** Cut flowers and foliage; top crops are dahlia, sweetpeas and lisianthus

**Production area:** 5 acres of flowers on a 10-acre farm

**Year-round employees:** 3 to 5 seasonal

### Wanted: Well-Rounded Employees

Building relationships also helps fill labor needs on the farm. Many employees have found LynnVale Studios through the art side of the family business. Lou’s background encompasses many fields — architecture, urban planning, entertainment design and fine art. At LynnVale, he paints, mentors professional artists and teaches art to local children.

“Our first employees came organically via the art students,” Gagnon said. “Other times, I’ve reached out to Virginia Tech to find horticulture students. We often hire high school students, stay-at-home parents and garden enthusiasts.”

The challenge is to find people who are well rounded enough to cover all the bases. “In any given week, people might be weeding, harvesting, designing for a wedding or cleaning a barn,” she said. “Some people find the variety appealing.” 🌿

**Julie Martens Forney** is a contributing writer for *Floral Management*.  
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## FOR LOVE AND LEARNING: A PRIMER ON BLOGGING

> Let's face it, you know more about flowers than you even realize. A blog is an amazing way to share this knowledge, and it is also a great way to provide fresh content for your site, which is good for SEO and for your social media platforms, which helps you connect more effectively with customers. The questions a lot of people in our industry have: What do I write about and how do I best use my time?

At Sun Valley, we have created what is likely the longest running weekly blog of original material in the history of the flower industry. As the longtime author of our blog, this gives me a unique perspective to share.

### From Scattershot Approach to Consistent Posts

I inherited the blog, Flower Talk with Lily ([sunvalleyfloralfarms.blogspot.com](http://sunvalleyfloralfarms.blogspot.com)), when I started working at Sun Valley Floral Farms in June 2012.

Back then, I was a newbie to the flower industry. My first challenge was that the blog was named by my predecessor. We kept the name because it already had some brand recognition, and we didn't want to lose that, but the name also reflected our desire for the blog to be seen as warm and personal — a bit like a friend dispensing good advice. (Plus, of course, it highlights one of our primary crops; naming the blog after a core characteristic of your business can be a good strategy.) I started writing as "Lily" but with a gender-neutral perspective, which usually works, but on occasion has raised some eyebrows when people meet me in real life.

As to what an industry newbie wrote about, my manager Ginny Wyche, instructed me to grab the camera and walk the farm nearly every day. I would get back to the sales office with a collection of photos illustrating all elements of flower growing. Things that seemed interesting to me, even if I knew nothing about them! I would ask Ginny the who, what, where, when and how about what I experienced on the farm; she would explain, and I would write.

I think there are at least two important takeaways here for florists: The first is, if you are too busy to blog, assign the task to someone on your team! With some guidance and mentoring, blogging can be an ideal way to expose a new employee to the many factors that go into running your business — and into the floral industry in general.

In my case, we quickly realized that if the uninitiated found a topic interesting, then the rest of our community would as well. I soon learned that my source material was endless. Topics now range from a deep dive into a particular flower, to thoughtful commentary

on the importance of flowers in our lives. The blog highlights design trends, flower-growing techniques, seasonal specialties, creative writing, videos, interviews, and muddy boots out in the flower fields.

We made one other important change my first year, one that involves consistency. Initially, when I started, we posted in sporadic bursts; however, by mid-2012, the blog settled into a rhythm. Since June 6, 2012, we've created a new post every week, rain or shine. That's more than 430 posts that we can now pull from and refer to in our communications with our staff and customers.

The screenshot shows a blog post from 'Flower Talk with Lily'. The title is 'Feel the Viburnum'. The main image is a close-up of bright green viburnum flower heads. Below the image is text explaining the 'early season' and 'late season' characteristics of the viburnum. A second image shows two bouquets of viburnum, one green and one white. The text below this image states that the texture of viburnum is also one of its strong suits.

**CONSTANT CONTACT** Since 2012, Sun Valley Floral Farms has posted a new blog every week. Topics vary from specific crop spotlights, to news from the farm and trends.





KACHKA/SHUTTERSTOCK

**“Topics now range from a deep dive into a particular flower, to thoughtful commentary on the importance of flowers in our lives. The blog highlights design trends, flower-growing techniques, seasonal specialties, creative writing, videos, interviews, and muddy boots out in the flower fields.”**

## Best Practices in Blogging

As a florist, blogging is a great opportunity to serve your customers. Here are some pro tips to get you started.

**Be a problem-solver.** A great place to start content-wise is answering questions. Start making a list of every question you have been asked over the years. These questions can be simple — for instance, “How do I remove pollen from my clothes?” — or more complicated, such as “How are there tulips available in November when they are a spring flower?”

**Provide “just in time” information.** We live in an age of “self-serve” information. People ask Google questions at all times of night and day, and a blog is an ideal way to be there to answer their questions, especially if you can predict the kinds of questions your customers might be asking at a particular time of year. Envision a bride wide awake in the middle of the night wondering if peonies are available for her wedding. She will take to the Internet, and perhaps it will be you who explains how the season moves from early spring northward up North America, peaking in Alaska in August.

**Choose the best provider.** You can host the blog on your regular website or use a free platform such as Google Blogger ([blogger.com](https://www.blogger.com)). The key is dis-

tribution. Companies such as FeedBlitz ([feedblitz.com](https://www.feedblitz.com)) offer a service for \$99 a year, which will look at a certain page on your website, find any new content, and email it out to your list of customers.

**Get social.** We get about 500-2,000 reads per post; more than half of these reads come from sharing on Facebook and other social media platforms. Over the years, some posts have spiked, getting more than 20,000 views. In the lifetime of the blog, we have about 700,000 page views!

**Focus on visuals.** Make sure your photos are sized correctly for the web. I use the free app **Canva** ([canva.com](https://www.canva.com)) to create perfectly sized and adjusted images for the web. It’s super easy to navigate.

**Repurpose content.** Once you have a great post, make sure you use it in different ways! Print out some copies of your blog and have it available in your shop, perfect for folks waiting in line or to send home with a customer. Submit the post to your local newspaper or news source —the Huffington Post has published several of ours! (See those examples at [safnow.org/moreonline](https://www.safnow.org/moreonline).)

**Be you.** Don’t be shy about expressing yourself. Some of my posts with the most reads are ethereal and whimsical pieces about flowers, not

technical themes. These often get more reads than the more scientific posts. These kinds of posts can provide an ideal creative outlet plus they show your personality — that’s important to any small business trying to stay on customers’ radar.

Writing this blog truly has been a labor of love and the unexpected thing that happened is the sense of accomplishment it has provided. Marketing in the digital age goes by so fast, advertising campaigns come and go, a popular Instagram post is still just a blip on the radar, but this body of work will be available to flower lovers forever, thanks to the power of the Internet.

The Flower Talk with Lily blog has given thousands of readers information, knowledge and hopefully a smile, but it has been a two-way street, echoing my favorite Chinese proverb about flowers, “A bit of fragrance clings to the hand that gives flowers.” 🌸

**Bill Prescott** is the marketing communications specialist at Sun Valley Floral Farms in Arcata, California. He has been a contributor to The Huffington Post and featured on the DIY Network and **HGTV.com**. He also consults locally with small businesses via **PrescottDesigns.com**. [bprescott@tsvg.com](mailto:bprescott@tsvg.com)

## CHIC SELECTIONS

> Nary a day goes by when Central Square Florist doesn't deliver an arrangement with callas. The cylindrical flowers, available in a range of colors, work beautifully for the Cambridge, Massachusetts shop's signature style: bright and contemporary. "Customers view callas as premium flowers, which also happen to have a great vase life (two-plus weeks with proper care)," said manager Jackie Levine. "They just love them!" Here, she shares two low-labor best sellers that bring in a handsome profit. 🌸

**Katie Hendrick Vincent** is the senior contributing editor of *Floral Management*. [kvincent@safnow.org](mailto:kvincent@safnow.org)

*Find complete recipes at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).*



**PRETTY IN PINK AND PURPLE** Chock-full of upscale flowers (callas, roses, dendrobium and cymbidium orchids), this design is perfectly suited for a milestone birthday or anniversary — "or anytime the sender wants to make a statement," Levine said. "It definitely delivers the 'wow' factor." Design time: 20 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$60. Suggested retail price: \$250. (Central Square Florist sells smaller versions, priced at \$165 and \$200.)



**CALLA CASCADE** Ikebana, a Japanese style of design that emphasizes balance and graceful lines, elevates this arrangement's perceived value. "It isn't something the average person could do at home," Levine said. "Recipients appreciate it is unique." Design time: 15 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$25 to \$30. Suggested retail price: \$90.



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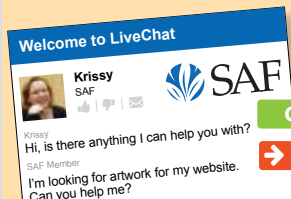
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## COLORFUL, VIBRANT, ELEGANT CALLAS

> Sculptural and elegant, callas come in a wide range of flower colors and sizes, offering designers a lot of versatility. Although colloquially called “calla lilies,” these flowers do not belong to the lily family. The calla’s ancestry has roots in several countries. This beautiful flower is native to South Africa, but the genus (*Zantedeschia*) was named in honor of Italian botanist Giovanni Zantedeschi. The common name, Calla, is Greek for beautiful.

Callas consist of a funnel-shaped spathe that is really a modified leaf with an elongated spadix (a fleshy stem covered with tiny flowers) inside. Calla varieties are available with white, pink, red, orange, yellow, brown, black and bi-colored spathes. Standard callas have spathes five to 10 inches long, while miniature calla spathes are three to five inches long. The standard calla most commonly appears white, while miniature varieties often come in colors.

Like gerberas and orchids, callas do not have leaves. Their stems contain calcium oxalate crystals (also present in the common houseplant *Dieffenbachia*’s leaves and stems), which may cause skin irritation and swelling of the tongue if eaten.

### Care for Callas

Some in the industry consider callas difficult to work with, but this should only be true if the flowers are handled incorrectly. If placed into water without a hydration solution or flower food,



KITAYAMA BROTHERS

callas’ stems will split, thus restricting water absorption. Callas bruise easily during shipping, but they should last six to eight days if handled properly. Factors that influence the final product include:

**Stage of harvest:** Flower stems should be harvested just before the edge of the spathe begins to turn downward. The spadix should also be visible. It is possible to pull the stems from the plant rather than cutting them.

**Hydration:** Callas are shipped dry and should be packed carefully to avoid bruising. Upon arrival, flowers should be unpacked promptly. Use a sharp, clean knife to cut about one inch from the base of the stem before placing flowers in a properly mixed hydration or flower food solution. Do not completely remove the stem’s white portion.

Growers should use dip solutions specialized for callas to reduce the chance the spathe will brown. Using plain water results in stem splitting. Wholesale florists should use hydration solutions while retail florists should use a full-strength flower food. In each case, the flowers should remain in the solution for at least six hours (up to overnight) for best hydration.

**Temperature:** Optimal storage temperatures differ for standard and miniature callas. Standard callas can be stored at 43 to 46 F while miniature varieties prefer it colder (between 34 and 36 F). Extended storage periods can cause the flowers to open fully.

To recap, you can achieve success with callas by following these six steps:

- Careful packing to avoid bruising
- Using specialized calla dips to avoid browning of the spathe
- Using hydration and/or flower food solutions to avoid stem splitting
- Keeping some of the white portion of the stem
- Following proper temperature management
- Avoiding long-term storage periods 🌿

**Terril Nell, Ph.D., AAF**, is professor emeritus from the University of Florida, a consultant to the floral industry and the research coordinator for the American Floral Endowment.  
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