I wondered, what leadership stories can we get from plants?

Judy Jean

This thought entered my mind after ASHS Class III Leadership Scholars cohort, and I shared and discussed the leadership themed books we read. The interesting thing about leadership books is that they typically come from the perspective of a company or a CEO that has been doing phenomenal in business. However, this doesn’t really resonate with science minded individuals. Let’s be honest. While these stories are inspirational and encouraging it can be difficult to apply a fortune 500 company’s leadership story to our everyday lives as horticulturists. With that being said, I think I’ve come up with a leadership plant analogy. If you like it, would like to build upon it, or have comments, please email me (jean.cjudy@ufl.edu)!

Often, I get approached by individuals requesting to have their landscape be full of color and blooming flowers year-round. However, that’s not how plants work, and I believe that’s true of us as horticulturists. Under the correct conditions, plants will display the physical attractiveness that we all become enchanted by. Questions begin to infiltrate the mind as to the different mechanisms that are occurring within the plant or under what other conditions can this plant have this same display. Like plants, we’re all different. I know shocker! Have you ever considered the team or individuals that you’re leading and what conditions you are providing them to allow them to bloom? Are you understanding that there will be season when they are not able to bloom? Are you patient with yourself to understand that you won’t have all the answers to these questions but humble enough to admit this?

There is an ice-breaker game I like to play with people. I ask them these two questions: What plant do you identify with? And what is your favorite plant? Ideally the answers should be two different plants. I implore you to ask the same questions about yourself and your colleagues/team. Then identify if you are providing the right conditions for these plants to bloom.
Through the ASHS Class III Leashersip Scholar program, I have been able to better understand myself through MBTI personality assessments and how others take information and make decisions. I am very grateful for this opportunity to learn how to better serve my stakeholders and peers.