When we asked consumers why they shop for plants at particular stores, most answered because of selection and convenience. Convenience is a given in this fast-paced environment where two-income families often find themselves in a crunch for time. There is intense competition for who will supply them the best goods and services for the best value.

Selection was the second reason given for shopping at a particular store versus other stores that offer plants. If the customer drives across town only to find that you offer the same plants as store A and B, then what was the point of loyalty? The sameness in merchandise will not make you different, unique, or add value.

Many plant buyers get into a rut thinking that the safest profits are from the old standards. So without hesitation they re-order exactly what they did last year and raise or lower the quantity depending on how sales did. Another buying trap stems from educational limitations of the buyers who take the same vender package offered from the same companies that everyone else buys from. It’s so quick and easy.

There is no doubt that the best merchandisers in the business will consistently have better stocks of merchandise with more sizes available, deeper assortments, and be more customer driven in their buying decisions. Better merchandising places the focus on individuality, uniqueness, and creativity with well thought-out displays that accentuate the value to the homeowner. There needs to be an understanding about the product that is stocked and the person to whom it is sold. Good merchandising demands some risk-taking to have distinctiveness rather than sameness. The displays need to be attractive, exciting, and invitingly fun. It is show time every morning when you unlock the doors.

Dr. Leonard Berry, director and founder of the Center for Retail Studies at Texas A&M University, relayed the following lessons from Stanley Marcus on retailing.

- You build a great company on value, not price. “Be excellent, not cheap.” This is the way to grow a one-of-a-kind business, with loyal customers.
- The best specialty retailers specialize in customers, not just merchandise. Work hard to personalize and add a touch of grace to every service for every customer.
- The excellent retailers lead rather than follow. Be innovative rather than imitate.
- Stores need sellers, not just merchants. Don’t let your customer buy unwisely. Show intensively, and fit the product to the need of the customer.
- Retailing will always be a “people” business. The key to success in retailing is excellent merchandising and service. The source of both is people. Compete for talented people, challenge them to be their best, educate them with ongoing skills and knowledge.
- Dream big dreams and attend to details.

Stanley Marcus retired from Neiman Marcus in 1977. In 2000, he was inducted into the American Advertising Hall of Fame.

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