

Is Martha Stewart on Your Pond Team?

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Everardo, a long-time employee at Across the Pond, enjoys turning mundane objects into water art. Another employee, Donna, increased rain barrel and aquatic plant sales when she filled oak barrels with water, black dye and aquatic plants and placed them around the store as displays. At Across the Pond, we joke that one of our employees has become the "Martha Stewart of Water Features." Everardo, a long-time employee, enjoys turning mundane objects into water art.

He might turn a colorful ceramic pot upside down, bore a hole in the top (which is really the bottom) and create a bubbling urn. He might arrange a spitter where the water cascades into an unusual reservoir.

We allow him the freedom to use his imagination in some of our display gardens, and it has paid off in terms of creativity and store aesthetics. We did not hire Everardo as an artist or designer, but that is what he has become.

People might use the term "think outside the box" too freely to represent anything out of the ordinary. In the retail market, however, that is exactly what you need to set yourself apart. You might find this trait in the most unexpected employees if you give them an opportunity to play with ideas.

In Greece last summer, I saw an interesting idea for shade awnings. I mentioned the concept to Donna, another Across the Pond employee who sews. She took the initiative to purchase a collection of vibrant outdoor fabrics and to craft her own version of the awnings I described. Using her talents and ingenuity, we created an inexpensive and unique shade area for our outdoor furniture display.

Donna also cares for our aquatic plants. We wanted to give the aquatic plant display more 'pop,' so I commissioned Donna to arrange some attractive examples. Not everyone has a pond, but anyone can grow aquatic plants. We just needed to put the idea out there.

Around the store, Donna placed various oak barrels filled with water and black dye to give a nice contrast to the variety of aquatic plants, displaying interesting combinations of waterlilies and grasses. The results have increased sales in our rain barrels and our aquatic plants.

Not everyone can turn a "sow's ear into a silk purse," but given a little encouragement and freedom to experiment, you might discover that you have a Martha Stewart on your team too.