

All-Stars
2026 WINNER



HIGHER LAW #9: IF
NOBODY PAYS ATTENTION,
PEOPLE STOP CARING

WHY WILLOWAY NURSERIES EARNED THE GREAT GAME OF BUSINESS FOLLOW THE ACTION AND KEEP SCORE ALL-STAR AWARD

The best scoreboards don't just report the score. They change the way people think. That's why Willoway Nurseries has spent more than a decade perfecting how everyone in their business knows whether they're winning or losing.

Founded in 1954 in Avon, Ohio, Willoway is a third-generation, family-owned wholesale grower of trees, shrubs, perennials, and seasonal color crops, shipping to retailers and contractors in 26 states. Willoway is now Ohio's largest wholesale grower of nursery products and a leading supplier in the United States, with a customer base of more than 2,400 independent garden centers and landscape contractors across the Midwest and the East Coast.

Since beginning its Great Game journey in 2015,
Willoway has continually challenged one assumption:

**IF EMPLOYEES DON'T UNDERSTAND THE NUMBERS,
CAN THEY REALLY HELP IMPROVE THEM?**

Every year, the answer led them to rethink how they communicate the business. Not because the scoreboards were broken, but because they believed they could always make them better. Each year, they asked the same question: **How can we make the business easier for everyone to understand so we can unlock their full potential?** Their relentless pursuit of an answer to that question is why Willoway is receiving The Great Game of Business Follow the Action and Keep Score Award.

KEEP SCORE LESSON #1

THE BEST SCOREBOARDS TRANSLATE NUMBERS INTO ACTIONS

Willoway has excelled in scoreboards for more than a decade. The leadership team, managers, and frontline all discuss profit before tax, gross margin, and revenue every single week. More recently, with the advice of GGOB coach Anne-Claire Broughton, the team has been focusing even more on creating line of sight for everyone in the company. Those numbers matter, but they aren't as meaningful to someone loading trucks, tending crops, or preparing shipments. The challenge isn't teaching accounting. It is creating understanding of the business among their nearly 500 employees.

**Since beginning its Great Game journey in 2015,
Willoway has continually challenged one assumption:**

INSTEAD OF SAYING: "WE NEED ANOTHER \$500,000 IN SALES TO EARN OUR BONUS," EMPLOYEES HAVE BEGUN TALKING ABOUT SOMETHING EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS, LIKE, "THAT'S ANOTHER 18 TRUCKLOADS, OR 3 TRUCKS A DAY."

Suddenly, the business isn't abstract anymore. People can see today's work inside tomorrow's results. That's what great scorekeeping does. **It doesn't overwhelm people with data. It helps them know what to do next.**

"We have created a positive culture where more people understand the Why!" says CEO Tom Demaline. "Having an engaged team has made my job easier in managing the tactical part of the business and harder to stay ahead of the wave."

KEEP SCORE LESSON #2

A SCOREBOARD ONLY WORKS WHEN EVERYONE CAN READ IT

Perhaps Willoway's greatest innovation wasn't technological. It was cultural. Every spring, about 300 seasonal H-2A employees join the company. Many speak Spanish as their primary language. Rather than treating language as a barrier, Willoway has viewed it as a design challenge. Scoreboards. Training. Financial literacy. Weekly Huddles. Everything was intentionally designed so employees could fully participate in either English or Spanish. Translators didn't simply convert words—they adapted ideas so they made sense to every audience.

That philosophy stretches back to Willoway's earliest GGOB implementation.

KEEP SCORE LESSON #2

A SCOREBOARD ONLY WORKS WHEN EVERYONE CAN READ IT

Even then, leadership insisted on teaching seasonal employees the company's financials rather than assuming they wouldn't be interested. Years later, that commitment remains. Willoway recently worked with coach Anne-Claire and a Spanish facilitator to conduct its first-ever all-company GGOB training in both English and Spanish. The team played The Great Game of Bouncing Balls, reviewed scoreboards, and connected the dots between what employees do every day and the numbers.

"At first they were shy," says Emily Showalter, Chief of Human Resources and granddaughter of the company's founders. "But now they are opening up and asking questions. They understand the numbers. That helps bring everyone together."

“ IF PART OF OUR WORKFORCE CAN'T FULLY
UNDERSTAND THE NUMBERS, WE'RE NOT
REALLY PLAYING THE GREAT GAME TOGETHER. ”

— EMILY SHOWALTER,
CHIEF OF HUMAN RESOURCES

KEEP SCORE LESSON #3

NEVER STOP IMPROVING HOW YOU COMMUNICATE

Many organizations build scoreboards. Willoway redesigns them. Over the years, their scorekeeping has evolved. Whiteboards have become digital dashboards. Employee feedback has shaped new communication methods. Artificial intelligence now helps generate updates more quickly.

**MILESTONES AND WINS ARE CELEBRATED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR RATHER THAN
WAITING UNTIL BONUS TIME.**

The question driving every improvement remains simple: "How can we make this easier to understand?"

That mindset explains why, after more than a decade of playing The Game, Willoway continues to innovate. Keeping score isn't a finished project. It's an ongoing experiment. Few companies have embraced the GGOB principles as fully as Willoway. A prime example is their successful application for and receipt of a grant from Shift Work Forward, a workforce development NGO, to bring in Anne-Claire Broughton as a coach to train their workforce and help refresh their GGOB play.



“ **WHAT IMPRESSED ME WASN'T JUST THAT WILLOWAY HAS GREAT SCOREBOARDS; IT'S THAT THEY NEVER STOP IMPROVING THEM. THEIR GOAL ISN'T TO PUBLISH NUMBERS—IT'S TO HELP EVERY EMPLOYEE UNDERSTAND THE BUSINESS AND KNOW HOW THEY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**

”

**— ANNE-CLAIRE BROUGHTON,
GGOB COACH**

KEEP SCORE LESSON #4

COMMUNICATION CREATES CONFIDENCE

Keeping score has never been about spreadsheets. It's about building trust. Throughout Willoway's Great Game journey, the company has repeatedly shown that transparent communication builds confidence—even in uncertain times. That became especially clear during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As an essential business, Willoway remained open even as several employees contracted the virus during the busiest season of the year. The company never stopped holding Huddles. Leadership communicated honestly and frequently across locations and languages, ensuring employees understood what was happening and no one was left guessing.

That may be the ultimate purpose of keeping score, not simply helping people understand the business but helping them trust it.

MORE THAN GREAT SCOREBOARDS

Willoway's scoreboards have delivered measurable business results. They've improved forecasting, reduced costs, supported record bonus payouts, strengthened communication across seven locations, and connected nearly 500 employees around a common goal.

But perhaps their greatest accomplishment is less tangible. They've created a culture where people don't have to wonder how the business is performing. They already know. More importantly, they know how today's work influences tomorrow's success.

"THEY HAVEN'T HAD A BONUS SINCE BEFORE THE PANDEMIC," SAYS BROUGHTON.

"That is partly why they brought me in this year to coach them, and why I encouraged them to pay out the bonus in two parts rather than waiting until the end of the year to pay it out. I wanted them to create a sense of urgency during the busy Spring season, and it has really worked."

The team recently created a bonus task force and has made a ton of needed improvements with feedback from the entire company, including the seasonal Mexican workers who said: "We need to re-pave the driveways so fewer plants fall off the trucks."

That kind of awareness about the business changes conversations. It changes decisions. And ultimately, it creates competitive advantages. At Willoway, Following the Action and Keeping Score is about teaching. It's about translating, simplifying, celebrating, and listening. **Perhaps most importantly, it's about never assuming the current scoreboard is good enough.**

Willoway has earned the Follow the Action and Keep Score All-Star Award because, year after year, they continue to ask one simple question: **How can we help every employee understand the business a little better tomorrow than they do today?**