



The Way of *Dahlia* Excellence

By Dianne Reitan

Kaylee Jade Dahlia



Brad Stulberg's new book, ***The Way of Excellence***, recently hit the NY Times Bestseller list. I had preordered the book right after the holidays knowing that 2026 was going to be a different year for me. The last five years had been such a whirlwind personally after going back to college to finish my degree and starting my commercial dahlia farm. With these two all-consuming endeavors, I rarely had time to watch a movie, peruse any of my beloved magazine subscriptions or travel. I have a lot of pride from what I accomplished and this winter as I finally catch my breath after all these years, I'm asking myself - what does excellence look like for me as I turn 54 this summer?

Excellence - the quality of being excellent - is defined in the dictionary as first class or very good of its kind. Stulberg explains that excellence is not perfectionism or obsession, and isn't that a welcome idea, especially with dahlias because gardens (and the weather) are rarely perfect and if we allow dahlias to become all-encompassing with no rest and renewal, then other things we value in our life, like health and relationships, take a back seat. The subtitle of the book, A Guide to True Greatness

and Deep Satisfaction in a Chaotic World, invited me to explore how excellence pertains to how we live our lives, not just how we may pursue an activity.

It's time for a reset. Now that I am semi-retired, I will start 200+ tubers (in [Cow Pots](#), of course!) and make a new dahlia patch in the backyard for my downsized business. Continuing to learn about the dahlia is very important to me as I value knowledge and there is so much to explore with the dahlia! I also value how this flower brings beauty into my personal life and how it lights up my customers and brings them joy. I need activities that lend itself to mattering, too, which is why teaching dahlia growing classes and starting the Southern Colorado Dahlia Society is at the top of the to-do list. Deepening new and familiar dahlia relationships means more quality time with my dahlia peeps.

To become a more well-rounded human being, I knew that I wanted to start up two new hobbies - activities that would work my mind in different ways and ground me. One of them being chess and so I purchased a set that allows me to play three ways: with another person across the table, with AI or with anyone around the world with a similar *Particula* board and phone app. The other hobby I wanted to take up was sewing. My grandmother taught me how to hand sew but up until a few months ago, I didn't know how to thread the machine I bought second-hand from a friend.



Excellence means involved engagement in something worthwhile that supports your values and goals. It combines mastery and mattering. It is not just for athletes, artists, or other masters of craft - it is for all of us, what we are made to do.

Brad Stulberg
The Way of Excellence



Last month when I posted on Facebook about a friend helping me to learn how to machine sew while we made pillows for cancer patients at a local hospital, American Dahlia Society Bulletin editor Pat Looney, liked the post. Not long after, she called me and asked if I would like to be part of a 'dahlia quilt' being constructed by other dahlia growers that would mimic the colors of the Kaylee Jade Dahlia. I was thrilled with the coincidence of what had just occurred (dahlias and sewing together?) but I was also a little freaked out. I don't know ANYTHING about sewing a block for a quilt. After convincing myself that I could do this with the help of my sewing friend, I pushed through the uncomfortableness of learning a new skill. As you can see from my completed block, it looks nice, even if some of my points don't line up perfectly. I felt a sense of accomplishment and belonging knowing that my block would be combined with other blocks made by other dahlia growers.

Isn't this the same feeling we have when we start with dahlias? We stare at this tuber or cutting and wonder how in the world we are going to keep it alive. We start fretting about how much water we should give it and whether we will allocate enough time to pinch, disbud, and deadhead to produce the best blooms. We are pushed out of our comfort zone knowing full well that we might totally botch the task at hand. Our confidence is low in the beginning and usually a friend, many times people we know in our local dahlia societies, show us the way to gorgeous and prolific flowers.



Dianne contributes to the Kaylee Jade Dahlia Quilt with her first quilt block.

New ideas come while taking a break or by doing something different. New opportunities can come that way, too. My new sewing hobby created a juncture for me to learn about and become involved with the Kaylee Jade Dahlia Day. Kaylee Jade Gonçalves was a 21-year-old University of Idaho student and one of four victims brutally stabbed to death November 2022 in an off-campus home in Moscow, Idaho. This variety name doesn't come from a happy story and we can't bring Kaylee Jade back, however **[A Bloom That Carries Light Through the Darkness blog post](#)** talks about Rivers Dahlias naming one of their most stunning new seedlings in Kaylee's memory. You can watch the interview **[here](#)** shared by the Gonçalves family and Rivers Dahlias.

I'm still in awe of how effortless two activities I care about came together in such a powerful and emotional way. And I'm so proud of my fellow dahlia growers who are coming together to support a family whose daughter has been taken from them. I was inspired by what Pat was telling me about the Kaylee Jade Dahlia Day and she put me in touch with the chair of the event, Lynn Sturgeon:

"Through the **[Southwest Idaho Dahlia Society \(SWIDS\)](#)** I met Pat Looney. When Pat was made aware of the new "Kaylee Jade" cultivar and special dedication possibilities in SW Idaho, she jumped right on board and contacted me to oversee an enthusiastic committee to coordinate the day. How could I turn down this opportunity to help ease the pain (in a small way) for the Gonçalves family trying to cope with such a tragic experience? A terrible injustice that rocked and will continue to sadden everyone in the U of I fold. My parents and children all graduated from the University of Idaho so I am in that fold too. Go Vandals! To be involved in an event that mixes the world of dahlias with the U of I - I'm all in!" *Lynn Sturgeon, Kaylee Jade Dahlia Day Chair*



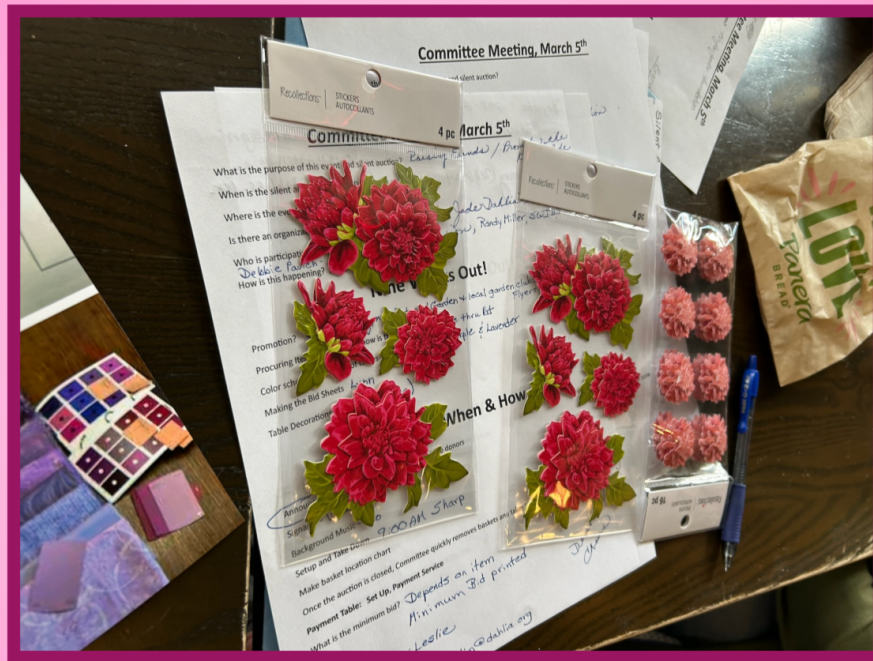
Ad for the Kaylee Jade Dahlia in the December 2025 ADS Bulletin

To me, both Lynn and Pat, and all of the committee members, are exemplifying excellence and I can only imagine the pride and sense of accomplishment they must feel personally for being a part of such a special event. Meshing values and goals together produces the feeling unlike any other. The committee has worked really hard on this silent auction - from selecting the colors and fabric of the quilt to the event promotion - and it would be so wonderful if we all could share this information with people we know in Idaho. If you want to reach Lynn directly, here is her phone number: 208-631-7576.

"Kaylee Jade Dahlia Day"
May 9th in Nampa, Idaho
 Franz Witte Garden Center
 Located at 20005 11th Ave. N.

The event will be a silent auction with an assortment of dahlia tubers and seeds donated by growers from several states, dahlia growing books, gardening tools, home decorating items using dried dahlias, t-shirts, etc. Also, there will be demonstrations and guest speakers during the event. Food trucks will be on site for food and beverages. People can bid on the dahlia quilt, too. This will be a very dahlia heavy event celebrating the "Kaylee Jade" cultivar. And boy, it's stunning!

There is no dearth of examples of our dahlia tribe coming together to help others as they model first class behavior. You'll see several articles in the upcoming April ADS Bulletin that will no doubt inspire you towards The Way of Dahlia Excellence.



Lynn's committee paperwork, color and fabric swatches for the Kaylee Jade Dahlia Quilt / Day



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DAHLIA TALK
CO-AUTHORS

