

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

For companies and individuals to succeed, there must be focus on innovation.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

Oftentimes padding silently alongside every successful cattle producer, is a loyal dog. A four-legged, tail-wagging companion, ready to serve their master in whatever way they can.

While this sidekick has been labeled for centuries as man's best friend, Jeff DeGraff, keynote speaker at the 2021 National Angus Convention & Trade Show Nov. 6 in Fort Worth, Texas, said in times of crisis, it's not a canine that fills the role. DeGraff knows innovation is the true key to success.

"If you are in a crisis, innovation isn't your best friend — it's your only friend," DeGraff told listeners.

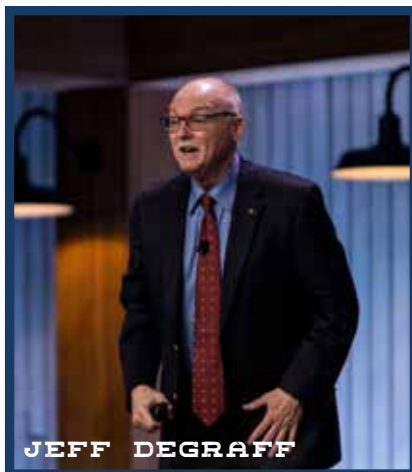
He diagnoses the current environment cattle producers are faced with as a "bit of crisis," and he encouraged spending time today finding ways to innovate to secure a successful tomorrow.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

In any line of work, DeGraff said people are constantly fighting to extract value from every moment while simultaneously trying to grow.

"To do that we have to introduce variation," he explained. "Innovation is a form of positive deviance. You must do something different if you're going to innovate."

He encouraged cattlemen to



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devote their energy to coming together as a group and building "hybrid ideas." He believes innovation requires two questions to be asked — how much innovation do we want to see, and how fast do we want to see it.

These questions will force individuals to engage in strategic thinking, allowing them to make two key decisions, which DeGraff said initiates innovative thoughts.

DeGraff said if quality is the goal, variation needs to be reduced. If market growth is desired, however, he said variation should be increased.

Identifying this distinction is vital to the success of innovative thinking.

INNOVATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

DeGraff said when it comes to innovation, people fall into one of four categories, and understanding these categories can help each other grasp the best and most innovative ideas.

The first group of innovators are labeled as "creators," and DeGraff said they often focus on vision. He likens these individuals to artists and said they often fill the forward position of innovation.

They excel in unique situations and help the team to gain momentum, but sometimes have short attention spans and can lack discipline.

The "controllers" are the next group. DeGraff describes these individuals as being data-driven, focused on efficiency and strategy, and dedicated to hierarchy.

He compares the group to engineers. The group sometimes struggles with being overly judgemental.

"Competitors" form the third group, and these people are focused on goals, DeGraff said. Like athletes, this group is notorious for desiring advisories, being driven by individual initiative and expecting rapid execution. He adds they sometimes



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Assemble a diversity of perspectives.

Engage in the conflict.

Establish a shared vision or goal.

Construct hybrid solutions.

struggle to realize that not everything needs to be a competition.

The fourth and final group are the “collaborators.” DeGraff describes the members of this group as being focused on values. These sages enjoy community engagement, focus on sustainability and are always trying to acquire new information.

He said this group, however, can sometimes be overly optimistic.

Each person is unique in the way they fit into these categories of innovation, but DeGraff said it’s the tension created by contrasting opinions and personalities that helps promote innovation.

“People have different world views,” he said. “Great combinations are oppositional.”

BONDS THAT LAST

Change often comes to the forefront of people’s minds when the going gets tough or when people are achieving high levels of success, but either way, DeGraff said change is the key to running a great business.

He reminded listeners that most organizations do not fail because of competition — they fail because they



can’t change their dominant logic.


“Innovation doesn’t start from the inside out,” he explained. “It starts from the outside in.”

To start the process of being innovative, DeGraff said it only takes four simple steps:

- Assemble a diversity of perspectives.
- Engage in the conflict.
- Establish a shared vision or goal.
- Construct hybrid solutions.

With a willingness to change and a creative mind, DeGraff said

cattlemen can allow innovation to become their best friend.

“Innovation is inevitable,” DeGraff said. “You can either be a part of it, or watch it happen.” 

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