

Merchandising



by Keith Evans

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Learn to talk with a four-year-old

If you want to learn about communications then talk to a four-year-old. My lessons come from the one I know best, my granddaughter Lindsay.

The other day I took her to dance class. Having done this only once before, I forgot that the class lasted only 50 minutes, ending at 10 minutes before the hour. I ran an errand, then drove back to the studio and planned to sit in my car until 6 p.m. About that time I looked up to see mothers and little girls coming out of the front door.

I rushed inside and found Lindsay looking around for me. The lady at the desk smiled and said, "She said that her Grandpa was going to pick her up, so we asked her what he looked like." Lindsay's answer was, "Well, he has a round face and two legs just like everyone else."

Of course, what the lady really wanted to know was not what I looked like, which is generally like every other male human being, but what features or clothes distinguished me from the other people

who were picking up their children. Did I have glasses? What kind of coat was I wearing? What color was my hair? All these questions Lindsay could have answered easily. But "What does he look like?" was all inclusive; she had neither the time or interest to provide the answer.

A few weeks later when Lindsay was preparing to leave our house for home she joked that she liked her house better than ours. Her dad said, "Why, Lindsay, you should be glad that Grandpa and Grandma have this nice house. What would happen to them if they had to live on the street?"

"Well," Lindsay answered, stating the obvious, "they would get run over."

We adults do this all the time to one another — asking the wrong questions to get the answers we really want. But instead of being amusing it creates confusion and sometimes it costs us sales. When a potential bull customer pulls up to a breeder's place, how often is he or she asked virtually the same question that the lady in the dance studio ask Lindsay? "What kind of a bull are you looking for?" The answer is often something like, "Well, I want a bull that's thick and structurally sound, with good feet and legs." Who doesn't? The answer sounds a lot like, "Well, he has a round face and two legs, like everyone else."

A more useful line of questioning might be, "What kind of EPDs did your last bull have?" Or, "Do you have calving problems you want to correct?" Or, "What weaning and yearling weight EPDs would you like in a new bull?" Or, "Do you sell calves, yearlings or finished cattle?"

Specific questions will usually get specific responses that can help identify the kind of bull that a buyer wants and needs.

For example, if I ask Lindsay, "What did you do in the nursery during church?" she'll invariably answer, "I don't know." She has no intention of describing an hour's worth of activity, blow by blow. But ask her, "Who was that little girl you were holding hands with when you came out for the children's moment?" and it can generate an enthusiastic conversation about the events of the past hour.

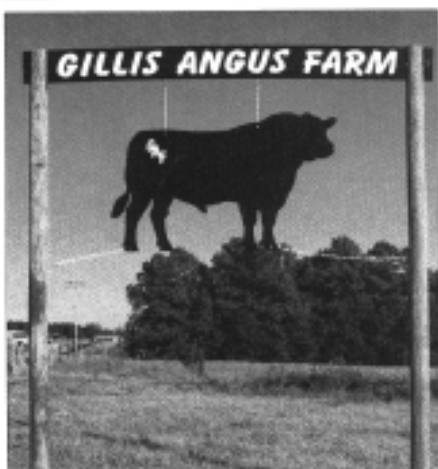
Another communications problem that Lindsay helped me discover is that we often unconsciously send messages that we don't intend. A few months back, when Lindsay came to visit, her positive answer to virtually every question had been revised from "yes" to "yep." Actually the word was drawn out in a drawl, something like "yeee-uppp." "Did you have fun at the playground yesterday?" "Yeee-uppp." "Want to go out and swing?" "Yeee-uppp." Finally after listening to this for a while, and smothering my smiles at this cute turn of events, I asked her where she had learned to say "yep." "Well," she said as she cocked her head and thought intently, "that's what the big people say."

Sure enough, I soon learned from listening to myself that I "yeped" with some frequency. Before that day, if you had asked me if I ever answered in the affirmative with "yep," I would have told you absolutely not. And that goes with a few others in the family, too.

Yep, it's easy to ask questions that don't generate useful answers, and it's even easier to send messages that we don't intend. Such a message can be as subtle as a farm sign with peeling paint that saw its best days years ago, yet stands there to tell everyone who passes by that the owner appears not to keep things up-to-date. It can be an advertisement which brags that the breeder has a bull "that does it all," when actually what sets the bull apart are his excellent carcass traits and very acceptable yearling weight. An unintended message can even come from a breeder who is a bit shy and retiring, but comes across to potential customers as aloof and unfriendly.

So if your sales are suffering because of poor communications, get in touch with the four-year-old in your family. If you can't communicate with her or him, then you probably don't communicate with your customers either. And if you don't have a four-year-old handy, contact Lindsay's Grandpa. He's that guy with ". . . a round face and two legs, like everyone else."

ANGUS SIGN OF THE MONTH



Wendell Gillis, Eastman, Ga., built this farm sign a few months ago. The bull was cut from a 4 x 8 foot sheet of 3/4 inch plywood and the lettering is vinyl. The farm name lettering is 9 1/2 inches high on a 12 foot, 2 x 12 pine board. They are held up by two 18-foot treated poles. Lettering was done by a local sign shop. "We have certainly had a lot of favorable comments since the sign has been up," Gillis writes.