

Part 2: Making Change Reality

Overcoming obstacles and defining purpose are integral to becoming an effective and efficient farm or ranch business.

by Kindra Gordon, field editor

Holistic management educator Joshua Dukart acknowledges, “Habits, beliefs and traditions are hard to change.” But he poses the alternative: “Do we want to look for change, or be forced to change out of necessity?”

Dukart notes that it is often easier to point to a neighbor and cite all the things they need to change. Use that mindset to your advantage. He advises, “Think about your operation as if you were removed from it or on the outside, and see what changes you might suggest from that viewpoint.”

Dukart encourages not only evaluating what you do based on cost and return in dollar values, but also time commitment. He says, “We are short on money, but also short on time, and need to recognize time is not something you can get back. Thus, sometimes the time commitment may need to override

the financial part when making choices.”

Consider social norms

In this process of evaluating and reconsidering business norms, Dukart also suggests having

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awareness for social conformity and peer pressure. He explains, “Social pressure often makes us do things without reason. Conformity is how we become socialized.” He outlines that many standard business practices — like

feeding hay, buying certain genetics, etc. — can be adopted simply because of the “everyone’s doing it” mindset.

Dukart says, “Fitting in and doing things like those around us makes us feel more comfortable — but is it the right solution for us or our farm?”

He continues, “If we aren’t asking our own questions and identifying our needs, we may just end up jumping from answer to answer for something that wasn’t a problem for our own operation to begin with.”

Dukart notes that many businesses excel at answering what, when, where and how. But instead they should have asked “why” they are doing something in the first place.

“That’s the more challenging question. And when you lead with ‘why,’ the how and what will fall into place,” he says.

He points to examples shared by Simon Sinek in his 2009 TED Talk to help illustrate this thought process. Sinek noted the Wright Brothers wondered why we didn’t have a flying



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machine to transport people; and Martin Luther King, Jr., wondered why people of color didn't enjoy equal rights. In each situation they identified their purpose or 'why,' and then set to work on the details of how to make that happen.

An application for the beef industry might be direct-marketing home-raised beef.

“That's a 'what.' Flip it and determine why you want to do that. Perhaps your why is because 'as stewards of the family ranch you are dedicated to raising a family, supporting community, stewarding land and livestock resources,’” Dukart suggests.

In marketing, Dukart notes that customers tend to become more loyal if they know our why and purpose. “People want to be part of something — a cause or belief. People buy why we do something,” he explains.

Efficient vs. effective

To that end, Dukart says, from this process of asking 'why' questions we should ultimately define the purpose for our farm or ranch business. Then write it down so it reminds us, our family and coworkers daily of why we are doing what we do.

As we do that, he advises giving consideration to efficiency and effectiveness.

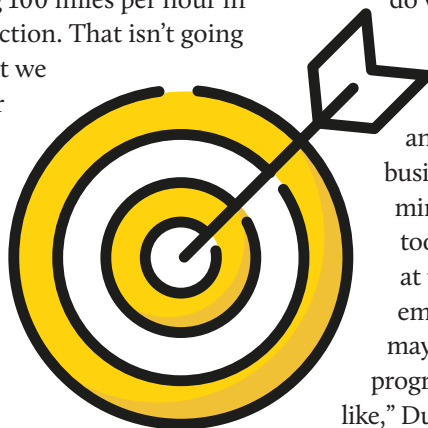
He poses another question: “Do we believe our actions/management can be 100% efficient, but 0% effective?”

He suggests the answer is yes — if you have not identified your purpose and focus.

“We must consider the order. We need to be effective before we can

become efficient. Otherwise, we might be going 100 miles per hour in the wrong direction. That isn't going to achieve what we want. I'd rather go slowly in the right direction.”

Dukart says the bottom line is this: “We need to refine our target and why we are aiming at it. Once we are effective, then crank it up and start being efficient.”



says. Instead, define what you plan to do with the money — that's a purpose, he says. Make sure to spend time thinking and strategizing from a business owner and investor mindset. “If we spend too much time looking at things from a daily employee standpoint, we may stay afloat, but not progress the way we would like,” Dukart concludes. 

More concepts to consider

Additional concepts Dukart suggests considering as you navigate through evaluating your business's purpose:

Adopt a mindset that is continually willing to explore. When things are not working, ask why. And, be willing to make a “to-don't list,” he suggests. This might include making a list of things that aren't working and brainstorming alternatives to replace them.

As you consider changes, find ways to genuinely respect past management while working to not let it restrict future progress.

“Don't let them think they didn't do things good enough. Things can change quickly and management needs to change with it. So any given operation may look different from generation to generation,” Dukehart emphasizes.

Recognize that making money is not a purpose, it's a result, Dukart

Editor's note: Joshua Dukart ranches in North Dakota with his family and is a Certified Educator of Holistic Management. Learn more at his website www.seekfirstranch.com. Read Part 1 in the March 2020 Angus Journal.