

# Directing Traffic

*Create flow using right pressure at right time.*

*Story & photo by Troy Smith, field editor*

It has been said that low-stress cattle handling is all about animal welfare, but Ron Gill insists it's also good for business. The Texas A&M University animal scientist and clinician prefers the term "effective stockmanship."

Performed correctly, low-stress handling techniques are effective for enhancing animal comfort, health and performance, but they also effectively ease wear and tear on working facilities and cattle handlers. All of that is good for people in the cattle business.

Gill demonstrated effective stockmanship through a series of educational sessions at the 2018 Cattle Industry Convention in Phoenix, Ariz. One of his lessons focused on initiating and controlling the flow of cattle when sorting animals in a pen or working cattle through a processing facility.

Gill reminded his audience of five basic principles of cattle behavior — principles their handlers should remember and use to their advantage:

- 1) Cattle want to see you.
- 2) Cattle want to go around you.
- 3) Cattle like to be with other cattle and thus, like to go toward other cattle.
- 4) Cattle desire to return to where they have been (to go back in the direction from where they came).
- 5) Cattle can think about only one thing at a time.

"Some people think low-stress handling means doing it with no



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pressure. Not true," said Gill. "It's all about pressure, but it's about applying the right pressure at the right time."

Using a group of animals in a sorting pen, Gill demonstrated the use of "drawing pressure," working from the front of the group to gain the attention of one animal and focus its attention in the desired direction. Working more from the side, he moved in and out of the animal's flight zone, and across its point of balance to get the animal to start moving past him. Getting one animal from near the edge of the group to start in the desired direction initiated flow by all members of the group.

"You initiate movement of one animal and let the others follow," explained Gill. He then showed how, while working from the side

and using well-positioned pressure, he could control and stop movement of the group.

The cattle also were put through a single-file alley leading to a squeeze chute, with Gill demonstrating use of tools for applying pressure, including sight, sound and touch. He showed how a handler working beside the alley and chute can start forward movement of an animal by moving past it in a head-to-tail direction. A reluctant calf can be further encouraged to move

forward if the handler brushes his or her hand along its back, in the same head-to-tail direction. Small sounds, like Gill's favored clucking noise, can also encourage movement.

"To be successful at applying pressure, a good stockman learns how to apply just enough, when to apply it and when to release it," emphasized Gill.

According to Gill, acclimating cattle to working facilities can pay dividends. Granted, it takes some time to put cattle through the pens, alley and chute (without restraining them individually) on a "dry run." However, it can save time and trouble later, when cattle are processed for real. Gill said this may be especially true for replacement heifer calves destined to make many passes through the facility during their years on the ranch. **AJ**

*Health & Husbandry*

*Editor's Note: Troy Smith is a freelance writer and cattleman from Sargent, Neb.*