

by Mark McCully
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Six Habits of Highly Effective Breeders

In 1989 Stephen Covey wrote the self-help book, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. The book went on to sell more than 40 million copies worldwide and has become Covey's most famous work. Spoiler alert: The habits are easy to identify, but hard to do.

This past year, it's been a highlight for me to cohost *The Angus Conversation* podcast. If you haven't already checked it out, I hope you'll tune in and see what we're talking about. We have a variety of guests and tackle a lot of topics, but some of my favorite episodes have been conversations with breeders where we get to hear their story and unpack their philosophies when it comes to breeding Angus cattle. Through those discussions and many others I get to have, I consistently hear some common themes. As to not totally copy Stephen Covey, I am offering six habits that I observe among highly effective Angus breeders.

To be clear, my classification of "highly effective" is not at all well-defined. It is not determined by herd size, years in the business, sale average, show winnings or the number of bulls placed in artificial insemination (AI) studs. It is more subjective, and speaks to the individual's definition of success vs. any overarching metrics.

With that said, here's my list.


1. Defined breeding objectives and goals. Probably obvious, but I am always impressed when I talk to breeders who are crystal clear about the type of Angus cattle they are breeding. They have clarity on traits important to them; the approach to improve or maintain those

traits, the environment and market their genetics need to thrive in; and the overall design and purpose of their breeding program.

- 2. Discipline.** Establishing objectives and goals is not that difficult. Consistently striving for them and not getting distracted by fads, trends or the success of other programs, however, is hard. Believing in the vision they have for their program, thinking in decades not years, and avoiding the temptation to chase something new every breeding season are impressive habits.
- 3. An established brand.** Brands don't develop overnight. They are built over time and established largely on the two habits above. A brand is a promise, and that promise is clear and consistent with highly effective breeders.
- 4. Networking.** It's apparent highly effective breeders have a substantial network. They talk and interact with a lot of different people, with varying perspectives and expertise. They learn and share. I am certain this habit contributes to success.
- 5. Always marketing.** Highly effective breeders understand it's not enough to just produce a great product. Marketing

doesn't just occur in the weeks leading up to their sale. It is a constant focus. I observe them spending significant time on outreach to new and existing customers, industry engagement, and brand promotion through traditional and new media.

- 6. Forward-thinking.** The final common thread I find across highly successful breeders is they continually look down the road. They anticipate change and stay open-minded and objective to new technologies and production methods. They don't rest on their laurels and continually challenge themselves to stay relevant.

Similar to Covey's book, identifying the habits of highly effective breeders is not that difficult. Putting them into action is. But the Angus breed is full of cattlemen and women up to the challenge, building programs to support their family and advance the beef industry, all with a focused eye on the future. I learn from them every day and hope some of their good habits rub off on me. 

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