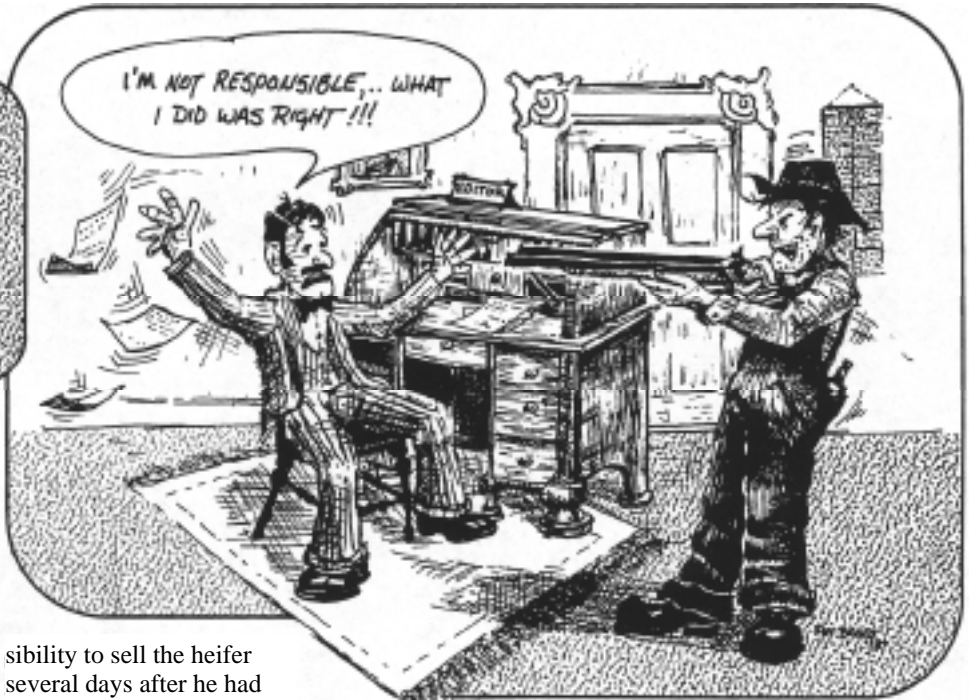


MERCHANDISING



Being Right Can Still Be Wrong



Some time back I received a letter from a father who was unhappy, to say the least, because he thought both he and his son had received a raw deal from a breeder of registered Angus cattle. From the sound of the letter it appeared a simple misunderstanding, caused by lack of communication, cost the boy a chance to show a 4-H heifer that year and cost the breeder a valuable customer.

Seems the father and his son, looking for a project heifer for the boy, found one they liked at a breeder the father had done business with before. The only problem was the price was more than they planned to pay. A week later they took a friend back with them to get his opinion on the worth of the animal. The heifer was still for sale and the price hadn't changed. But they didn't buy that day either. Two days later the father called to say they would take the heifer, only to be told by the breeder that they had decided to keep her for their own herd.

As the disgruntled father wrote, "Now here we are, one week until the 4-H deadline, we made two trips (300 miles total), bothered a friend to go along for half a day, (made) three telephone calls, and no heifer. We lost the heifer and (they) lost a customer."

Certainly the breeder was completely within his rights to change his mind. Both legally and ethically he had no respon-

sibility to sell the heifer several days after he had priced her to a potential buyer.

But being right isn't the point, not when the situation led to a past customer disappointed enough to write me about the problem and no doubt to tell other potential customers about his disappointment and dissatisfaction with the breeder in question.

How simple it would have been had the seller said to the father and son as they left, "Sure good of you two to come back. If you decide you want the heifer, let me know. I'll hold her for you until noon tomorrow."

On the other hand, if the father and son were still interested when they left the farm, they could have said, "We like the heifer. We'll talk it over on the way home, and I will call you tonight, one way or another, if you will agree to hold her for us until then."

But neither of these things happened. The potential buyer thought he had an open deal. The potential seller figured he had missed a sale and made plans to keep

the heifer. There was misunderstanding on both sides and this is what normally leads to a disagreement or worse.

In the absence of a contract, written or verbal, it's a good idea for the seller to keep in mind that though the customer may not always be right, he always has the last word about the seller and his operation. That's why it's always good business to bend over backwards to see that a customer goes away satisfied.

There's a story in today's newspaper about an editor back in 1919 who was shot dead, right at his rolltop desk, by an unhappy subscriber. Never mind the editor was fully within his legal rights to publish the fact that the subscriber had been arrested and fined \$10 for public intoxication. The editor remained dead with the subscriber in jail.

It just makes the point, rather dramatically, that being right can be no great consolation whether you sell newspapers or Angus cattle.

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