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## The curse of knowledge

*An experiment was conducted where a group of people were divided in half. One half was designated to be “tappers” and the other half was designated “listeners.”*

The tappers were given a list of 25 commonly known songs like the “Star Spangled Banner” and “Happy Birthday to You.” The listeners had the job of guessing the song based on the rhythm being tapped.

In the experiment the listener only correctly guessed the song three out of 120 attempts, or 2.5% of the time. Although the important part of the study is that before they began, tappers were asked to predict the success rate they would have communicating the song to the listener.

They predicted 50%. Tappers believed they could successfully communicate one out of two times, but, in fact, they were only effective in one out of 40 attempts.

Tappers had knowledge which made it impossible for them to imagine what it is like to not have that knowledge. Try tapping out a song without hearing it in your head. It’s impossible.

Once we know something, we can’t “unknow” something. With that knowledge bias, it is hard to imagine what it is like to not know it.

### Knowledge bias

We have a hard time sharing our knowledge because we have a hard time recreating our listeners’ state of mind. With the song playing

in our head, what we are tapping seems so obvious. We have the curse of knowledge.

This all seems innocent enough for a fun little game of tapping out songs, but I believe this curse of knowledge is on display in our everyday lives and explains a lot of communication breakdown we experience.

I think about our communication efforts as the American Angus Association. We work to educate members about the details of programs, genetic selection tools, marketing concepts and complicated research, but I’m sure it can occasionally sound like random taps to someone without knowledge in these areas.

As a registered Angus breeder you have an intimate knowledge of your cows, genetics and expected progeny differences (EPDs), but likely we can have a disconnect with our commercial bull buyers who don’t have that same background.


### Connecting the consumer

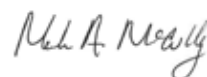
Yet where I believe we are most cursed by our knowledge is when it comes to connecting production agriculture and the realities of food production with the consumer.

I constantly hear the cry from cattlemen that we need to “educate the consumer.” As producers we can

not fathom how consumers come up with some of the misinformation and unfounded ideas about how their food is produced.

When we communicate with each other, it all makes perfect sense. We all have the same song playing in our head to connect the taps. Outside of our ag community, we work to communicate the science and rationale behind our production practices and share the lengths we go to take care of our animals and the environment. Yet without the knowledge we as farmers and ranchers have, I suspect many times consumers only hear a bunch of unconnected taps.

While not as obvious as tapping out songs, our inability to recreate the listeners’ state of mind can keep us from communicating as effectively as we think we are. Whether we are connecting with each other, our commercial customers or the beef consumer, being conscious of our knowledge bias is so critical. What song is playing in your head that keeps you from connecting the taps you are sharing? 



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