

# doing a better job

## MERCHANDISING

by Keith Evans, Director of Communications and Public Relations

Around nearly every turn on this nation's country roads is someone selling registered beef cattle. Merchandising bulls is about as competitive as the farm equipment business.

Not surprisingly, farm equipment dealers the past few years have rediscovered the value, or rather the necessity, of making sales calls. One midwest machinery dealer explained it this way, "You can't sit and wait for sales in this economy. You've got to go get them. We go out and make sales calls just like in the old days."

Those of us who produce and market bulls should take note. It is time for more registered Angus breeders to discover that sales calls are just what the name implies—a way to generate sales.

Unfortunately, most of us have a generally low image of "salesmen." I experienced this attitude when I suggested to my 19-year-old daughter that she should consider sales work when she finishes college in a few years. Her first reaction was, "I don't want to be a **salesman!**" And she emphasized that dreaded word.

She did confide during our conversation that what she liked best about her part-time job in a gift and card shop is the opportunity to help people. She has good taste, and she knows her product and she likes people. She can wait on a customer who is on his way home from the office and has nearly forgotten his wedding anniversary, and have that man going out the front door a few minutes later with an appropriate card and gift. "It's fun to help people and make them happy," she said.

With some success I explained that she is already in sales and that helping people solve their problems is one measure of a good salesperson. All of us look upon the person as a friend, not a salesman, who can supply us with a product that makes our life simpler, makes us look or feel better, makes us more money and performs as well or better than we expected.

Moreover, the people who are most successful at selling products and services to other business people are the ones who understand enough about

their customers' business to be helpful. They must understand how the products they sell fit into the potential customer's operation—how their product can perform a task faster or better, save time or money, or increase production and profits.

So, if you understand your own cattle and know how they perform in good

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commercial herds—if you understand your customers and potential customers enough to know what they need and want—then you can make an effective sales call.

Before you drive to someone's place, set up a plan of action. Decide who you need to contact and how to approach them. If you don't know much about a particular operation you can find out this information when you call upon them. An initial sales call on a person you don't know well should be used primarily to get acquainted. Take the opportunity to learn about their operation, and to explain your breeding program.

But, whether you are making a first call, or visiting the herd of an old customer whom you know well, be prepared. Know the message you want to deliver, and take with you something to leave behind. A herd brochure is an excellent, relatively inexpensive sales piece that stays with the prospective customer after you have left. It can reinforce what you have said and serve as a reminder that you paid a visit. It also should contain all the information the customer needs to get in touch with you, or drive to your place.

Like the machinery dealer who makes a sales call, you probably are not going to make a sale on the spot. Your goal is to interest the person

enough in you and your cattle to make him or her want to visit your place. So if possible, set up an appointment before you leave.

When someone makes an appointment to see your herd, again, be prepared. This visit is simply an extension of your original call, designed to result in the sale of cattle.

If you know what animals the person is interested in, separate them from the rest of the herd. Put them in convenient, attractive pens and clean them up a bit if they need it. Also have your records readily available.

In the final analysis, the purpose of all this planning and preparation is to sell cattle. So it is important that you ask the person to buy. More sales are lost, experts tell us, because no one asks for the business than for any other reason. We can all think of reasons why we should not spend a large sum of money now. The salesperson's job is to explain why now is the best time to buy and then ask for the sale. Something as simple as "Which of those two bulls do you want me to deliver to you tomorrow?" can bring results.

The best production scheme in any industry is of little value without a good sales plan. Selling and merchandising is the backbone of our free enterprise system, and sales calls are an important part of the overall merchandising program in many industries.

And remember, selling, done correctly, is a service to and never an imposition on the prospective buyer.

AJ

**QUOTABLE:** "Have you ever received a magazine subscription from a friend? Sure leaves a good taste, doesn't it? I have a challenge for you. How about checking your list of customers since last January 1 and buying them a membership in the Georgia Angus Assn., if they aren't already a member. This would do a lot to promote your place, your breed, and your state association."

—Bill Hodge, West Point, Ga.  
Georgia Angus Assn. President  
(from the *Cow Chips* newsletter)