

MERCHANDISING

by Keith Evans, Director of Communications and Public Relations

The Grapevine Will Get You If You Don't Watch Out

"Never say anything bad about anyone. They are all related."

This has been the motto of one Angus breeder who moved to northwest Missouri many years ago. He learned this, he says, from serving a stint as county agent in a Minnesota community.

It is a good motto for everyone, even politicians. Surely it should be a rule for those of us in the Angus business. As some of you have probably learned, the Angus grapevine is amazing, not in its accuracy, but in its swiftness. I have come home from an evening meeting only to have someone from across the country call me on the telephone the next morning and tell me all that happened or what they believed to have happened. Things are much the same within any community, including the beef cattle community.

Holding one's tongue can be especially difficult when a customer seems to mistreat us or appears to do something stupid, like buy from a competitor. Often the temptation is to unload on the person who happens to be closest at the time, or maybe even a friend. But that moment of satisfaction can hurt business for a long time to come.

Some time back a reader sent me a column about a manufacturer (we will call him Bob) who one year lost all the business of his biggest customer. The customer decided to buy a product made in Taiwan that was cheaper and almost as good as what he had been using.

That year at a trade show the buyer was afraid to see Bob who had been a friend and supplier for years. The buyer even considered not coming to the trade show because of his fear of confronting Bob. But as it turned out, Bob greeted the man like a long-lost friend. He didn't let the man's business decision get in the way with their long and beneficial relationship.

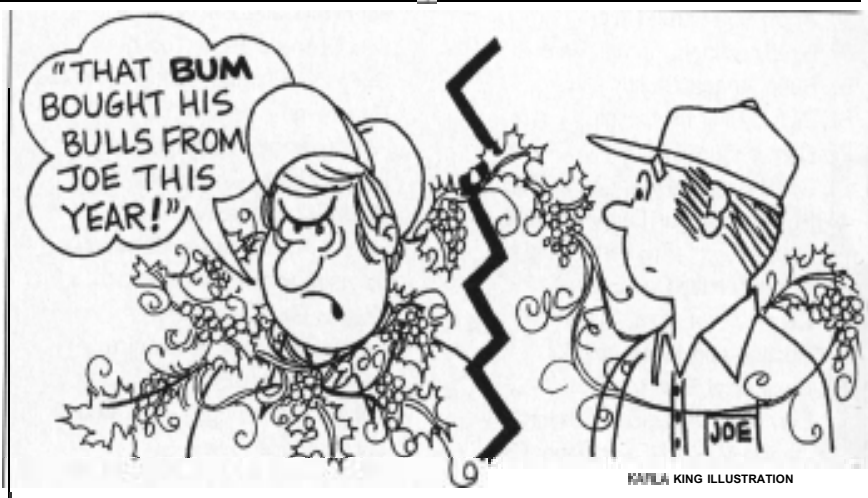
To make a long story short, the buyer who had taken his business to Taiwan stopped by later in the day to

place the following year's order with Bob. It wouldn't have happened, though, had Bob taken the man's business decision personally and told everyone he knew what an unreasonable and unfaithful businessman the former buyer had become.

Bob never knew why he got his business back. Had he said something

unguarded moment.

Life is too short to do business with someone you feel uncomfortable with, or don't like. By the same token, life is too short to take things personally in business. Understand that your customers, too, are in business to make a profit, support their families and a host of other important reasons. You may never



foolish that got back to the buyer and drove him away permanently he would have never known that either—which is the way of business. If you do enough things right then business improves. Do too many things wrong, and the reverse happens. You can seldom pinpoint exactly what leads to a sale or what keeps someone from buying from you.

Marketing is a complex business. People buy from one business or another for a variety of reasons or combination of reasons. How well they like the seller, price, convenience, performance, quality, guarantees, advertising, reputation, free delivery and more. They are all important, but none are powerful enough to overcome a perceived insult, or even an unkind remark tossed off in an

understand why they didn't come to your sale this year, or why they bought bulls from a breeder who doesn't have half the quality in his cattle as you do. So don't try. Assume the best, and stay on good terms with everyone.

We don't need Dr. Joyce Brothers or any other psychologist to tell us that words can hurt. Most of us have felt the pain at least once in our life. So when tempted remember the veteran Angus breeder's advice, "Never say anything bad about anyone. They are all related."