



For Granted

► by **Eric Grant**, API Creative Media manager

Contingencies

A devastating blizzard swept across Nebraska and much of the Midwest the day we had our production sale earlier this year. Its blowing winds and drifting snow shut down Interstate 80 and U.S. Hwy. 6. Customers were stuck on the shoulders of highways, calling us on their cell phones, trying to find a way to get through, or a way to buy cattle if they couldn't. The auctioneer didn't even arrive until about 60 minutes before the sale.

No joke

It was a difficult experience to go through, but I know we learned some valuable lessons.

On the plus side, thanks to Superior Livestock Auction, which allowed us to reach customers via satellite who couldn't be there in person, we were able to move ahead with the sale as planned. While we recognize the sale wasn't as strong as it could have been, we walked away from the whole event feeling pretty good about what we were able to accomplish that day.

Perhaps the biggest lesson of all is how little time we spent leading up to the sale planning for worst-case scenarios. We joked about a bad storm hitting that day, but moved ahead with optimism that Mother Nature would treat us fairly.

When we woke up that morning to a foot of fresh snow and winds pounding against the windows, I think everyone involved with the sale wished we'd thought this through a little more precisely and that we'd had a "contingency" roadmap to follow just in case. It would have relieved some pressure, for instance, if we'd set a "snow date" for the sale and had notified our customers before they left their homes and got stuck on the highways.

Necessity in business

Contingency plans should always be part of any business: What happens when the next blizzard strikes? Where do you go if a flood destroys your place of business? What cash reserves or access to money do you have if you hit a financial bump in the road? What do you do if your best bull customer decides he's going elsewhere to buy bulls this spring?

Keeping customers returning to your business is a particularly challenging issue facing seedstock producers these days. There are so many choices to choose from, so many sales, so many new technologies that can be leveraged into marketing advantages by your competitors.

It starts with your ability to articulate the advantages of using your genetics, and doing so clearly, concisely and articulately. It continues with your ability to propagate genetics that work well under commercial conditions. It depends on your ability to receive constructive feedback from your customers about how your genetics are working. And it hinges on your ability to conduct business in a sustainable way through fairness and honesty.

You should combine these things with an eye on all the unexpected possibilities

that could hurt or help your business as well. If you've learned to be an effective communicator — and all great seedstock producers are great communicators — then it's easier to sell cattle when the storm hits. If you've recognized that Mother Nature can blindside you on your year's most important day, then you can recover from her devastating blows much more quickly and move on.

Most of all, if you approach your business realistically and with full knowledge that both good things and bad things will happen during the course of a year, then you can hedge yourself in against the low blows and temper yourself against the highs.

As Rudyard Kipling once wrote,
*If you can dream — and not make
dreams your master,*

*If you can think — and not make
thoughts your aim;*

*If you can meet with Triumph and
Disaster*

*And treat those two impostors just the
same ...*

*If you can talk with crowds and keep
your virtue,*

*Or walk with kings — nor lose the
common touch,*

*If neither foes nor loving friends can
hurt you;*

*If all men count with you, but none too
much,*

*If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance
run,*

*Yours is the Earth and everything
that's in it,*

*And — which is more — you'll be a
Man, my son!*

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Editor's Note: "For Granted" is a monthly column written for the Angus Journal by Angus Production Inc.'s Creative Media manager Eric Grant. The column focuses on marketing beef, the beef industry and seedstock in particular — aspects of the business that are often taken for granted as day-to-day tasks take center stage.