



Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

Creative people are more happy and productive

Creativity is the key to successful seedstock advertising and marketing. Yet, far too many people in the registered beef cattle business don't view themselves as creative — but they are wrong. I know that from experience.

Followers or creators

My grandfather, when he retired from farming, became a full-time carpenter. He didn't plan it that way, but he usually had more work than he could handle. This occupation came about partly because he didn't charge much, but mostly because he was good.

When I was a child, we regularly went to our grandparents' house for Sunday dinner. At some point the conversation usually got around to carpenter work, which my father also loved. With obvious delight Granddad would relate how he solved some carpentry problem. Both men were creative workers, able to figure out new ways to do things and how to solve a problem by modifying a tool or making a new one to get a job done.

Most important, both men were genuinely happy people. They thrived on the simple pleasures of family, church, farming and making and creating things.

In the early 1940s, before the electric lines reached our corner of the world, Dad had a four-cycle, single-cylinder, water-cooled engine that provided power for various tasks. It pumped water, ran Mother's old-fashioned washing machine and spun a small generator hooked to a car battery to power our radio, connecting us to the outside world.

Dad built a wood lathe, run by the engine, with which he turned out many items, the most creative of which were croquet mallets. These beautiful mallets were made of hedge (Osage orange) or walnut, with wide brass rings on each end. They were in strong demand from many locals who frequented the local country store where a new community croquet court was attracting a wealth of players on evenings and weekends. Dad always had some project going; if it wasn't mallets, it was something else.

My late brother followed in his father and grandfather's footsteps. He built and modified farm machinery. He designed and remodeled a small farmhouse into a beautiful home. When he needed a circular staircase to access the basement in the new addition, he turned on his creative juices. He drew up a design on a grocery sack, built it in the farm shop and it fit perfectly into the space for which it was designed.

What's the connection?

Pardon my reminiscing, but all this came to mind as I read an article about creativity and how it can affect all our lives. "Being creative," the author said, "is the key to being happy in any job and to doing better work." Creativity is not limited to artists or writers,

it is a force that every human can develop and utilize. In fact some so-called creative people who make music, paint, draw, sculpt or write are followers rather than creators.

The same is true in beef cattle marketing — we can be followers or creators. The choice is mostly ours.

Fortunately, breeding and marketing registered cattle provide a wealth of opportunities for creativity. As if to nurture creativity, the business of farming and ranching often opens up long periods of time (checking cows, driving a truck or tractor, etc.) when people can think, plan and create with little distraction.

My brother had never built a circular staircase until he had the need. You may have never built a great advertisement because you haven't seen the need or because you didn't think you could. But the potential is there. It requires little more than shedding your inhibitions and allowing your creative juices to flow uninhibited.

Plan to be creative

You stand a greater chance of success if you start with a little planning. Before you can create, you need the proper tools and materials. Decide what you want to tell potential customers and what you want them to think about your operation and your cattle. Write down the most important benefits a buyer will receive from you and your cattle. Have a goal in mind. Michelangelo didn't just start hammering on an oversized block of marble to create his breathtaking statue of David. He had a good idea of what he would create before the first marble chips started to fly.

Once you have sketched out, in your head and on paper, the problems you can solve for potential customers and the reasons they should buy from you, you might be surprised by the creative solutions that spring from your mind if you let them. Don't put limits on your thinking, allow and encourage ideas to flow. Some of the things that spring from your creative mind may initially appear odd or even crazy, but that doesn't matter. Write them down. Later, the best of these "crazy" ideas may form the nucleus of a powerful advertising and marketing program.

The process can be liberating. It is not just "other people" who have creative thoughts and ideas. Creativity is endemic to the human condition. Why else would it contribute so much to our happiness and the quality of our work?

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