



# What Drives Success?

Focus on being a lifelong learner and success will likely follow.

by *Kindra Gordon*, field editor

In the beef industry — where weather, market conditions, input prices and consumer influences are ever-fluctuating — success can seem like an elusive goal. How can those in the industry sustain their involvement and optimism?

A strong work ethic, faith, valuing integrity and moral character are all key traits that many successful people emphasize. Yet another critical ingredient toward achieving future success may be having an open mind to be a lifelong learner.

John Spence, a business and leadership consultant, emphasizes that investing in personal development and identifying values and goals are essential to future success.

“If you’re not dedicating 10% to 15% of your time to improving [yourself and your business], you’ll be outpaced,” he says. “Invest in yourself. It will change your life and career.”

Additionally, Spence likes to prompt people of all ages to think big about the future, posing the question: “What do you

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need to do that will make an impact 10 to 15 years from now?”

He tells individuals, “You can’t just make daily decisions; you must make 20-year decisions and think about the next generation.”

## Read and learn

Regarding resources for learning, Spence notes that many options are available online — from free college courses to TED talks on an array of topics. He also encourages individuals to read books to challenge their thinking and to increase knowledge.

He reports that after graduating from college, the average person reads 0.5 books per year. To this, Spence said, “If you read six books a year, you would be in the top 1% of the U.S. population for self-learning. If you read 12 books per year, you would be in the top 1% of the world for self-learning.”

Books and articles can be a useful tool to prompt changes in thought. Additionally, when articles (or webinars) are shared among a farm or ranch family or business management team to read and discuss, they may help stimulate new ideas for the business.

Of this approach toward preparing for change and new ideas, Spence notes, “The

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industry is changing, and we have to change or we won't survive."

Spence encourages individuals to take time to develop a focused plan for their future.

"Ninety percent of people have no written goals," he shared. "They have no plan for success. Hope is not a strategy."

Spence also believes that being surrounded with a network of successful people is important.

"You become what you focus on and like the people you spend time with," he emphasizes. "What you focus on will determine what your life looks like 10 years from now."

### Industry perspective

To what do those within the beef industry attribute their success? "The ability to see the big picture of the past, living in the present, but envisioning the future," is what Ronnie Green, chancellor of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, credits with his path to success. Along with being visionary, he adds that the ability to communicate with people is essential.

"Persistence, along with a strong belief in the value of our business concept," is the core quality Patsy Houghton attributes to her success in establishing Heartland Cattle Co. in McCook, Neb. After 26 years in business, Heartland counts more than 105,000 heifers developed and artificially inseminated, more than 175,000 calves weaned and started for area feedyards, more than 75,000 cattle fed to finish, and nearly 40 research projects completed.

Houghton notes, "When start-up challenges are combined with the normal

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day-to-day obstacles every business owner faces, such as long hours, debt load, cash flow, market fluctuations, burdensome regulation, etc., it can all become overwhelming. An ability to tackle each challenge one by one, while maintaining focus on the overall business concept, was crucial to finding our way through the maze." Assembling a team of high-quality, committed employees and identifying customers who share the business vision is also important to achieving success, she says.

"It takes priorities," is what brothers Shawn and Shane Tiffany say when asked how they can accomplish so much. As co-owners of a Kansas-based feedlot, these brothers jokingly say they don't watch TV; rather, they pour their time into their faith, family and business. Shane adds, "We are both Type-A personalities. In the early years of our business, we felt we had to have a say in everything, but we learned to turn responsibility and trust over to key employees, and they've flourished in those roles. In turn, it's allowed us time for family and other roles."



**Editor's Note:** Kindra Gordon is a freelance writer and cattlewoman from Whitewood, S.D.

### Being a successful leader

For individuals who have the additional responsibility of being a business or organization leader, business strategist John Spence advises that to be a successful leader you must first recognize what people want from leaders.

Based on his research of successful business leaders, he says it boils down to the following:

People want a leader who will:

- ▶ tell the truth;
- ▶ has a clear vision for where the business or organization is going;
- ▶ has the skills to get the business or organization there successfully;
- ▶ is excited [passionate] about taking the journey with their employees; and
- ▶ treat individuals fairly and support them along the way.

In a nutshell, Spence says the best leadership advice is to simply follow some basic rules: show up on time, do what you say you will do, finish what you start, say please and thank you, and give more than others expect.

"It's that easy, but very few people do those things. If you become one of the few people who do those things, you will become other people's hero," Spence concludes.

Learn more about Spence at his website [www.johnspence.com](http://www.johnspence.com) and see some of the books he recommends by clicking on "Resources."