Planning: Start at the End

Good times can cover up poor management. When profits ae plentiful and the work is easy, decisions…even incorrect decisions… can be withstood. These aren’t good times. Record high fuel and fertilizer prices mean that farm management needs to step up to the challenges of the new day.

The same thing goes for any business; the same thing goes for personal management as well. Tough times require tough decisions. So where do we start when the financial storms come? Most times the best place to start is with ourselves and thinking about where we want to end.

This is where planning and remembering take different skills. When we recall things that have happened to us and seek to share these events with others, the best place to start is at the beginning. To be truthful, as we begin to make plans it is important to know where we are and where we’ve been. But successful managers have a clear view of where they are going well into the future.

A good example of reverse analysis is a discussion my daughter and I had about a business venture idea she had. I mentioned to her several years ago that people often asked me if I bred Springer Spaniel dogs. They would see Bo and Ty as we traveled about and want a pup of their own. “That’s a great idea!” my daughter replied, “We should totally start selling puppies.”

On the surface, that would seem to be a good idea. I had a ready audience as a therapy dog handler and Springers are just as cute as they can be; they’d sell themselves. It would seem to be a natural next step to start a kennel and offer pups for sale.

All of the previous is true, but let’s look to the end and work back. First of all, while I love Springers, I really don’t know the first thing about judging the confirmation of dogs, nor do I have any experience showing dogs. Building “Champion bloodlines” that are often advertised is difficult if you don’t have any idea what those are or where to start establishing them.

This isn’t limited to dogs. I have seen this in registered cattle for years. People would buy a calf “with papers” and state that they would “breed the good into them.” Bad genetics are like bad luggage; you carry it with you until you quit trying to carry it at all.

I don’t know anything about breeding dogs…. Problem number 1. Problem number 2… I think Springer puppies are the cutest things ever. It is highly likely that if I did have a litter of pups for sale, I would not be able to part with them. At some point, I’d be a hoarder not a breeder.

Problem 3… As long as you are in business to sell anything, there will be customers who cannot be satisfied. I have no desire to field phone calls in the middle of the night about a pup that failed to live up to some crazy person’s overblown expectations. Not all dogs, not all Springers for that matter are Bo, Ty, Bear, Nolan, Liz, or McConaughey (shout out to Ryan and Erin!)

Problem 4… Springers can have some pretty serious genetic issues that if you were not familiar with mating combinations, you’d be more prone to blunder right into. The only thing worse that a crazy, irate customer is a crazy, irate customer who has a point.

All of these points, these four problems, are very real possibilities for someone new to running a kennel and selling puppies. I share these points with farm groups I speak to about the perils of “chasing your dream and catching a nightmare.”

Again, this is not limited to farming. I have heard people tell friends that they are such good cooks, they should open a restaurant. Running a restaurant is easier when the food is excellent no doubt, but running a restaurant is more about managing labor, meeting health requirements, schmoozing customers and managing costs than cooking. Like farming, it’s a tough business and one that needs to be fully investigated before pulling the trigger with one’s own money.

So when you are doing some thinking about what your future holds, put some time into thinking about the end and all the issues that might stand in your way. Talking yourself out of an opportunity is a possibility but that is far better than going broke because you didn’t do your research.

Upcoming Events

Aug 18 Forage Field Day, SW AREC VPI Farm Road, Emory VA

Aug 23 VQA Calf Sale, Tri State Livestock Market 7 PM

Aug 29 VQA Steer Take Up 7 AM to Noon

Aug 31 VQA Heifer Take Up 7 AM to Noon

Sept 12-17 Washington County Fair

Sept 23-25 Chilhowie Apple Festival

Sept 23-Oct 2 State Fair of Virginia

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