

THE TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

Embrace the tools and attributes that propel you forward; throw out those that hinder progress.

Commentary by Troy Marshall, American Angus Association

It's that time of year we tend to sit down and establish our goals for the upcoming year. The cow-calf business is as complex and competitive of a business as I know. As a result, I think sometimes we forget about the basic tools for success.

The first several "tools or attributes" are almost universally recognized and applied by cattlemen, but they are still worthy of mentioning because of their importance. They are *hard work* and *commitment*.

Hard work is universally accepted and applied. It is about having self-discipline and the energy to do your best. This is rarely an issue because cattlemen follow the third rule — *do what you love*.

Mindset for success

The fourth tool of success is probably where most of us need to start focusing. Let's call it *overcoming the obstacles of a traditional or restrictive mindset*.

I'm not smart enough to know if it is our paradigms or world view or simply our subconscious that tends to prevent us from breaking away from the norm. I do know that it is natural to be resistant to change, or to come up with sound, logical reasons to keep doing things the way they have always been done.

Every business/marketing article you read talks about the importance of differentiating and the willingness to be different. It is our desire to conform and

maintain the status quo that often prevents us from succeeding.

I've been guilty of telling myself all the reasons why I can't market my calves more effectively, why I can't implement that rotational grazing program, or why I can't afford xyz piece of equipment. I'm sure some of you share the most dangerous and most common mindset of cattlemen that tells us this is a great way to make a living, but not a very good way of making a living.

A little incentive

The next tool of success is one that seems counterintuitive: Cattlemen's biggest problem is that they don't have a big enough problem. One must have a big enough problem to provide the *incentive to change*. We may want to make more money, or know that we should be doing something better; but does it force us to take action?

That brings us to the next tool for success — *the willingness to act*. The key is starting small, but thinking and dreaming big. Stephen Covey says it's not only taking action, but taking the right action. He describes it as doing the important vs. the urgent or, to say

it another way, the meaningful vs. the sexy action.

We tend to not act because we fear failure.

Thomas Watson tells us, "The formula for success is to double our rate of failure."

It truly is about being focused, taking aim and then firing. Missing the target really is not that big of a deal when you step back and

realize that by taking the shot (acting) that we are able to adjust, recalibrate and focus on the bull's-eye.

Of course, action needs to be focused, and that relies on *setting goals* and *creating a plan to achieve them*. It allows us to focus our

energies on the outcome.

It is important to learn to look for opportunities. The old adage is that we miss opportunities because they often come disguised as work, problems or challenges.

Put it all together

If you have the tools for success listed above, the next step is to put together the right materials to work with. These attributes again are not revolutionary. Focus on *people* and *knowledge*.

Independence is a great thing, but a team can accomplish far more than an individual.

We must have faith in ourselves and maintain a positive mental attitude. We must have the courage to take risks and to move outside of our comfort zone.

Good things happen as a result

of momentum. Momentum comes by taking that first step and then the next, following through till one completes their mission. Learn, dream, plan, decide and ultimately take action!

Obstacles

Putting these tools of success together doesn't guarantee a successful outcome. That is because we need to eliminate some tools that actually prevent us from succeeding. Again, these are not revolutionary, but they are devastating by the simple fact they thrive in the face of complacency.

Some of these negative tools are procrastination, and finding a way to stay busy while avoiding doing the truly important things that move us forward toward our goals.

Planning is a great thing, but too much planning has a way of preventing us from taking positive action.

Then, of course, there is the negative habit of living beyond our means. This business demands we maintain our focus on being low-cost producers. The No. 1 cause for business failures is not a lack of profitability, but rather a lack of cash flow.

Finally, there is the destructive nature of a negative attitude. We can be negative about the markets, Mother Nature or political policies, but those are not things over which we have direct influence.

Often we focus on them because they allow us to shift blame. By searching for people or circumstances that prevent us from succeeding, we are exempting ourselves from responsibility.

If marketing your calves more effectively is an opportunity you want to pursue, AngusLinkSM is one of those tools that can help you get there. |

Editor's note: Troy Marshall is director of commercial industry relations for the American Angus Association.

TOOLS/ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESS

- ▶ hard work
- ▶ commitment
- ▶ doing what you love
- ▶ overcoming restrictive mindset
- ▶ incentive to change
- ▶ willingness to act
- ▶ goal-setting
- ▶ plan of action
- ▶ team of people
- ▶ knowledge

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