



# Beef Talk

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## Be proactive when working with cattle

“Blunt force trauma” is a set of words one would not expect to use starting a beef column. However, the topic of this column is safety, and working cattle can be challenging.

Chuteside etiquette means having a system in place to get the job done and done safely. The work environment needs to be safe before any cattle arrive, and a process needs to be established that clearly identifies who does what.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center has worked cattle under many environments and participated in training to help establish good chuteside processes.

One item that always sticks in my mind is a demonstration at one of the incident-command trainings that center personnel attended. Sheri, the presenter, asked for someone to come forward to participate and started handing tennis balls to Sam, the volunteer.

Handing him the first, second and third balls was not an issue. However,

Sam needed both hands as the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh balls were handed to him. When Sam was given the eighth ball, all the balls fell to the floor — thus the old saying, “I dropped the ball.”

The point is simple. Sam could not do all that was expected of him. A common mistake in cattle operations is one person trying to do all the work or trying to coordinate all the work. That does not work. Safe working environments mean the producer needs to be willing to delegate responsibilities based on a fundamental trust in others. How does that happen?

### Benefits of being proactive

To start with, a proactive, not reactive, mind-set must be present. For many organizations, workdays start with meetings where discussions can open the door to good planning. No one likes meetings, but proactive people meet, discuss and lead, while reactive people find themselves dispersed, cussing and following.

Proactive people have goals, objectives, outcomes and know what will be done before the day begins. Reactive people simply look back at the day and then determine what was done. The point comes back to producer mind-set.

Good work environments mean sharing and understanding each other’s duties and responsibilities. Various people can be cross-trained to allow for systematic coming and going. If a crisis does develop, everyone in the working environment knows precisely who to look for to get direction.

Even the response to a crisis in a proactive setting is organized. Meanwhile, a response to a crisis in a reactive setting is disorganized and usually leads to more problems. Training is important and many people working cattle have good training. However, it is the organization of the day’s events that allows that training to be utilized efficiently and safely. Once the day’s activities start, proper breaks are essential because fatigue and stress can take a toll as the day moves on.

Heat is a killer on the cattle that are being worked and the people doing the work. Keeping cattle and people hydrated is critical.

There are many steps to having good working environments, but the key still is producer mind-set. One can make the working day difficult, tolerable or enjoyable. The best pick is enjoyable.

In all the years of working cattle, one is never too old to learn. There are good seminars and educational days

that demonstrate good techniques that blend cattle and people in a productive, working mode.

One day, I was watching a group of cattle being worked and had empathy with the individual and the cattle. As the producer tried to sort the cattle, one could see the change in attitude and approach. The producer became the ogre and the cattle the beasts. The process was not working. The longer the process went on, the more stressed the cattle became and the more frustrated the producer became.

In a reactive mode, the ogre decides to out-muscle the beast. When that does not work, the ogre decides to employ more force to overcome the beast. Yes, eventually the beast will succumb and the ogre can proclaim victory, but at what price?

All that did not have to happen if one simply would have decided to outthink the cattle before the day started. Moreover, if cattle workdays are not going as well as one would like, a serious evaluation of the working facilities may be in order.

Even with good planning and a proactive approach to the day, if inadequate chutes, panels, fences, gates and all the other required aspects of a working facility are not present, the day will not go well. Cattle operations need to invest in working cattle equipment.

What is the goal at the end? No blunt force trauma, period.

May you find all your ear tags.

