

What's Your Why?

Thinking of situations and obstacles you've overcome helps find your "Why."

Author's Note: Continuing with our series with five steps to develop the next generation, I'd like to ask you a very open-ended question, "Why?" Let me explain:

In agriculture, we're conditioned to just "handle it," putting aside uncomfortable issues or long-standing problems in favor of tackling immediate needs like harvest season or calving. Yet, such reactive thinking is not the way of the future. Proactive, forward-looking approaches are necessary to meet new demands. The first step in building a strategy to coach people effectively is to understand "Your Why."

Simply put, "Your Why" is your purpose and how you want to see that purpose fulfilled. For many farmers and ranchers, our land and our animals represent a life's work; it's who they are. It's their identity. Does that describe you?

Have you asked yourself lately why you raise cattle? Depending on the season, I am sure you have questioned it many times — but this is not at all a tongue-in-cheek or sarcastic question.

Where Does It Hurt? Qs to Identify Your Pain Points

- Why do I farm (or why did I come back to the farm)?
- Is farming the career of my choosing?
- What is the most satisfying element of farming?
- Why is farming important to me?
- What happened during my transition into farming that I don't want to repeat for the next generation?
- What is my greatest fear about the future?
- What important business decision or action am I putting off? **HW**

“If you have trouble answering these questions, don't automatically think that you can't figure out 'Your Why.' Consider asking the people closest to you to answer the questions and weigh-in on your behalf.”

Why do you want your farm business to outlast you? Why does it really matter?

One of the most common "Why" responses I hear from ranchers and farmers is explained in the retelling of an experience they had earlier in life. Often in the situations and problems they faced — and overcame — their "Why" emerges.

What are your pain points?

Yet, finding "Your Why" isn't always obvious. It can take some real soul searching and serious discussions with family. If "Your Why" isn't immediately obvious, don't get discouraged and skip this process. Instead, try looking through the lens of something you likely know well — your pain points, or specific problems that resonate with your business.

Like using acupuncture for decision-making, I use the questions in the sidebar during executive

coaching conversations with business leaders and farmers alike. These questions can really move the needle when a leader seeks clarity.

Don't be alarmed, but I need to tell you that even the toughest among you may become emotional when you really begin to think about these questions.

Maybe you already have.

Don't let that stop you from doing the work. I always tell my farming peer group members that it's not a good meeting unless somebody cries. And, it's the tough guy every time — and that's OK.

If you have trouble answering these questions, don't automatically think that you can't figure out "Your Why." Consider asking the people closest to you to answer the questions and weigh-in on your behalf. We have mirrors all around us.

Finally, resist the urge to blow off this exercise because you are too busy to worry about it. This piece is foundational and worth it.

If these pain points resonate with you, you may have found "Your Why." Write it down. **HW**

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