

Stepping into Leadership

Sometimes the biggest hurdle is us.

Last month, in the *Baldy Advantage*, we talked about the risks involved with stepping into leadership and why stepping up can feel a little bold or brave — even when you care about an issue. The reason might be more complicated than you think.

Have you ever heard someone say, “It’s just luck,” or the more jovial, “Better to be lucky than good”? While this sounds modest, it’s imposter syndrome. Even when we know we have the skills, experience or the motivation, sometimes our inner “imposter” chimes in with feelings of self-doubt, inadequacy and the fear of being exposed as a “fraud.”

When you think about it in those terms, stepping into leadership on behalf of the beef industry can create fear. But being afraid of leading is a natural response to the unfamiliar territory leadership represents. It stems from fears of failure, lack of control, public scrutiny or judgement. Add these to the small circles in our industry, and truly, it’s no wonder people put their heads down or stop making eye contact when a leadership opportunity emerges.

Overcoming the hurdle

Here are six ways to tackle imposter syndrome and step up to lead.

No. 1. Embrace vulnerability:

To conquer the fear of leadership, it’s essential to acknowledge vulnerability as a strength rather than a weakness. Accept that you don’t have to have all the answers. It’s OK to ask for help or admit when you don’t know something. Vulnerability fosters connection and trust — essential qualities for effective leadership.

No. 2. Cultivate self-confidence:

Boosting your self-confidence is crucial when stepping into leadership. Start by recognizing your strengths, skills and accomplishments. Create a list of past achievements and remind yourself of the skills that got you to this point. (*Hint: There is a reason you are feeling driven to lead — embrace it.*)

No. 3. Set realistic expectations:

Understanding that leadership involves challenges and setbacks can reduce the fear of failure. Instead of striving for perfection, aim for progress and continuous improvement. Mistakes are valuable learning opportunities that can help you grow as a leader.

No. 4. Engage with purpose:

Fear of the unknown can hinder progress. If the issue matters enough to you, it likely matters to others in your sphere. As industry leaders, engaging in discussions, advocating for change and participating in the dialogue is essential for shaping policy and progress.

No. 5. Self-awareness and reflection:

Before embarking on any leadership initiative, go ahead and take stock — reflect on your strengths, weaknesses, values and goals. Self-awareness is the cornerstone of effective leadership, and it is an effective weapon in the fight against self-sabotage. Understand your leadership style, communication preferences and how you handle challenges.

No. 6. Lead by example:

Leadership is not about giving orders; it’s about setting an example. Demonstrate the qualities you want to see in others who follow you. This often comes more naturally to those in the agricultural industry. Just getting started is often a great way to stop the imposter within. The perfect place to advocate may be your social platforms. Your actions will speak louder than words and inspire people to follow.

Imposter syndrome is a common experience, and it affects even the most confident and successful people that you know — and maybe even you. But when it’s time to step into leadership, you can silence that imposter monster with a few simple steps. Our industry, and even your own operation, needs your leadership. **HW**

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