

## Step Up and Lead

Somebody should do something — and it's you.

Sometimes stepping into leadership hardly feels like a choice, especially when you hear the age-old phrase: "Someone should do something." It really hits home when you look around and realize that someone, is you.

If your journey into a leadership role is imminent, one of the most important ways to get started is through cultivating influence. Building influence can take time and effort, and it's not an egotistical thing. We often think today of "influencers" being famous (*or infamous*) people with a high-profile social presence, but that's just one example. Building influence matters because it's about getting the attention of those who need to hear from you to trust your message. Influencing in our quest to step into leadership is easier to start than you might realize; two ways to build influence are through effective communication and building a network.

Influential communicators meet people where they are and communicate with them in a way they understand and accept. For example, let's say you need to step into leadership on your own farm/ranch operation with employees or family members. Does the process of communication currently work in your operation? If not, consider building your own communication norms. Everyone's different. Some like to text, some like to pick up the phone, some like group apps and some don't. One of the easiest fixes is to establish a norm that everyone's bought into and agrees to use. Practice active listening to better understand the needs and concerns of your team. Bottom line, communication fixes a host of little problems.

When you're looking to lead externally, it's time to build your network for influence. To do that, you must continue to develop yourself and surround yourself with a support network of mentors, peers and friends who can provide guidance, encouragement and a safe space to share your doubts and fears.

### Ways to grow as a leader

Here's a recap of some tried and tested ways to grow as a leader that you might want to consider as you go into the new year.

#### No. 1. Join a board of directors:

Get involved in your local community, whether it's livestock-based or not, by volunteering to serve on a board of directors or get yourself elected to the board of a trade association, town council or rural electric cooperative. You'll learn new skills and be involved in high-level decisions that will provide new insights for your own business. Ask those who have served on the American Hereford Association Board, and they'll tell you the experience was invaluable for the friendships they made and the knowledge they brought back to their own farm.

#### No. 2. Build a peer advisory board:

If you can't join one — build one. By assembling an advisory board for your own business with people who have an outside perspective on your operation (not family or staff), you'll create deeper relationships with

professionals and mentors you trust. It's a great way to bounce new ideas around with those not too close to the business.

#### No. 3. Join a peer-group network:

A peer-group network managed by a third-party facilitator is a fantastic way to deepen your relationships with like-minded, growth-oriented producers. Share stories, benchmark your financials and be ready to get valuable feedback.

#### No. 4. Attend workshops:

Get out and go. If you don't have at least one or two professional conferences or workshops on your calendar each year, you should. Content, learning and engaging with others are necessary to keep approaches fresh.

Stepping into leadership is a journey that requires courage and self-awareness. While the fear of leadership is natural, don't let it be a barrier to personal and professional growth. Remember that leadership is not about being fearless but about finding the strength to lead despite your fears. **HW**

Sarah Beth Aubrey is an entrepreneur and founder of Aubrey Coaching and Training (ACT). She can be reached at [sarah@sarabhethaubrey.com](mailto:sarah@sarabhethaubrey.com).