

Positioning for Now and Next

Avoid complacency in the new year.

Many threats challenge our livelihood in beef production and agriculture, from political risk and government regulations to shifting economic tides. However, I believe complacency is the most concerning threat to businesses of all sizes — from a hobby show farm to a major cattle feeding operation.

Complacency is the tendency toward thinking deep issues will go away. It is the tendency to avoid doing the dirty work under the hood. Complacency happens in our operations when we decide we are simply too busy working in the business to work on the business. These are a few considerations for preventing or moving past complacency in 2025.

Hire right

Have you taken an honest look at how you are building your bench for the future? How far from retirement are you? Have you begun searching for the next CEO or had serious talks with your son or daughter about joining the ranch? Besides your own successor, what does hiring look like for your team in 2025 and over the next two to three years? Most importantly, is this topic getting the attention it deserves?

While many top producers don't enjoy the process of hiring and firing, avoiding it means not being prepared for changes, emergencies and long-term growth. Hiring for the future and developing employees is easier than hiring during an emergency and simply tolerating.

Solve the problem

I've heard many times from second- or third-generation producers that they must live with some problems because they inherited them. Just because you didn't create the problem doesn't mean you shouldn't try to solve it. For instance, we talked about culture change and ways to shift culture in previous articles. If this topic hits home, you might find value in reviewing them.

Complacency really takes root with the attitude of: "Well, I didn't create this mess, why should I clean it up?" Instead, look for ways to be proactive and take the necessary steps to rectify long-term problems. What aspect of your business is messy and requires necessary cleanup this year? Bookkeeping, community relations, local engagement? Maybe, it is marketing and promoting how your operation is sustainable and working toward a regenerative future.

Identify problems in your operation you've been avoiding (pain points) that you know must be resolved to grow and thrive.

Build anew

Radical change is sometimes the easiest fix. While that might seem to run counter to solving problems, as just discussed, oftentimes, when it's time to change, it's time to change big.

Look at all aspects of your business and marketing model. Is the process of change already happening, but you have not begun to shift

with it? For example, new markets, such as programs in sustainability are becoming mainstream. Does it make sense to wait for industry-wide adoption of these initiatives or is there a fit for your business in the near term?

"Fix it, close it or sell it," was a favorite slogan credited to former long-time General Electric CEO, Jack Welch. This advice speaks to the fact that there are diminishing returns in business if you are not the market leader. Maybe a new diversified business line that supports your more traditional production system is the way to build anew.

Reviewing the future of your business at least once every year is essential and keeps you ahead of the complacency trap. **HW**

Editor's Note: Readers of *Hereford World* know Sarah Beth Aubrey as the long-time author of ACT's Playbook. She takes on the rapidly evolving arena of sustainability with this new column. As Aubrey explains, "We'll cover definitions, concepts and ideas. We'll explore what's current and what we in the beef industry have known about sustainability all along. We'll do a little cussing and discussing, too. Bottom line, we know our business, and we know we're the best at what we do. It's time to step into sustainability and tell our story."

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