

Straight to Your Bottom Line

“Why Do You Do It That Way?”

By: Jay Thurman

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“Dad, why do we drive this way when we go to Grandma’s house?” was the question from my daughter. “Because this is the fastest way,” I replied. “That’s odd,” she said “the app on my phone says that it is faster to go a different way”. I take some pride in navigating long trips in the fastest way possible, so it bothered me that I may have missed a short-cut somewhere. I decided to investigate this new route once we arrived at our destination.

My investigation revealed that twenty years ago when I decided on this particular route, it was the fastest way. However, since that decision was made, two lane highways have been widened to four, loops have been built around larger cities and the speed limit was raised to 75 MPH.

Why did I still drive that same route? Had it become habit or tradition to pass the same landmarks year after year? Of course it had. At some point I convinced myself that this was the best route and never revisited that decision again. As a result, I did not take advantage of faster and shorter routes. Each time I didn’t take advantage of improvements from road construction projects or a change in speed limit, it cost me time and money. I was content with the traditional route and was not aware of the lost potential advantage.

The point is this; I had made the right decision twenty years ago. As time passed though, the circumstances changed. Improvements were made and the original conclusion was no longer the correct decision for today. How often does that happen in decisions that we make as it pertains to managing a dairy farm? Could it be that we are completing daily tasks on the farm based on technology and knowledge that was the best information available ten or twenty years ago?

Have you noticed that oftentimes it is the younger employee or outsider that can ask the best questions when it comes to the management of your operation? This curiosity is usually not motivated by pride or any other motive other than just wanting to know why. “Why do you do it that way?” It is probably a pretty good question!

Most good business managers are fairly diligent in keeping up with new technology, products, processes, etc. However, I would challenge you in the next few weeks to ask yourself or the person in charge of that particular area, “Why do we milk cows in that order?” “Why is the vacuum pump operating at that setting?” “Why are we feeding that ingredient?” “Why do we treat cows in the hospital with those particular drugs?” Fill in the blank with your own questions.

This process could take many forms on a dairy. Perhaps the question comes from the next generation after returning from college or after working at another dairy. Maybe it is attending a few more industry educational meetings and asking yourself some hard questions. It could be that a consultant, a

neighbor or a sales person asks the right question to spur you on to a new level of success in your operation. Whatever the case, a smart dairy producer will hold on to the success of the past while keeping an eye out for new ideas to improve the dairy's future profitability.

Obviously, striking the correct balance between the past and the future is the goal. We don't need to reinvent the wheel, but at the same time we don't need to drive the same route to Grandma's house every time. If there is a better, faster route to get there than there used to be, perhaps it's time to reevaluate. If you are able to find a few areas in your operation where tradition or habit has trumped science or efficiency, perhaps you can take advantage of those improvements and add them Straight to Your Bottom Line.