

What Makes A Good Consultant? Ask This Guy

ANDY ANDREWS
Editor

MYERSTOWN (Lebanon Co.)
— What are the hallmarks of a good consultant?

First and foremost, according to one expert: a good consultant "is really good at asking questions," said Jack Murray, who with Suzanne manages the Knockroe Group, Inc., Hughesville.

Murray spoke last week during the first of the two-day 2003 Galaxy Conference, a professional development school for agriculture extension agents conducted at the Lantern Lodge in Myers-town.

Murray, who spoke to about 130 agents registered for the Penn State-sponsored event, noted that consultants also have to be "thinking people" and ask themselves, he said, "who am I talking to? Where are they coming from? What is going on in their world? And what is competing for their attention?"

Consultants cannot simply have the answer in their heads before they even have a chance to know all the implications of the work being done for whom they are consulting with. "You have to understand *who* it is you're dealing with," Murray said.

What defines a good consultant?

According to Murray, it's the customer's opinion that counts. And only that. "It's not what *you* think, but what the customer defines as good," said Murray.

Companies that have failed to listen well have spelled their own doom. He gave three examples of failure by companies that jumped too soon on product promotion without knowing exactly what they were doing:

- During a major product promotion for curling irons in Germany, advertising was targeted for a special hair "mister." After the third day, the promotion was a bust. Why? Because in German slang, "mist" means "manure."

- Gerber Company promoted its baby food using its trademarked cute baby on the bottle label. They promoted this in Africa. The only problem: in rural Africa, many natives can't read. They determine what's in the bottle by its label. So to them, a "squished baby," noted Murray, just didn't sell.

- At one time, a company promoted T-shirts with a portrait of the Pope in Spanish. The slogan, "I saw the Pope," was prominent on the yellow T-shirts. In Spanish, the correct wording would have been "L'Papa." However, the T-shirt read "La Papa," or "the potato." "They did not sell," said Murray.

"It pays to take the time out front to determine what to do," Murray noted.

Murray outlined several behaviors on the part of customers across many industries:

- They resist change more out of a fear of the future than a love of the past. There are too many unknowns.

- By focusing on the "uniqueness of their needs," consultants can ring in success. The consultant can't simply give the same old talk to different groups.

- Deliver the truth, even if it doesn't seem appropriate at the time. "You have to stay focused," noted Murray.

- You don't have to solve every problem. Some are best left ignored. "Some fires are meant to burn," Murray said.

- Strive for behavior change. Just presenting information does not guarantee behavior change.



Speakers at the Galaxy Conference last week in Myers-town included, from left, Peg Shuffstall, Penn State; Daney Jackson, associate dean, Penn State College of Ag; Kim Evancho; and T. David Filson, south central regional director, Penn State. Photo by Andy Andrews, editor

Using correct "fact" can create a big impact.

- Use true diplomacy. That involves the ability to tell others things "they don't want to hear in such a way that they want to listen," said Murray.

- The good, successful consultant will be rewarded not by what they know, but that the customer "knows how much you care," he said.

- Be prepared and on time. Get people's names right. Call ahead if you're going to be late. And call them back to follow up.

- Don't label. Early labels are "particularly risky," Murray said. Some people are "hammer people" who see every problem as a "nail."

Murray used the following "gardening metaphors."

- Well-prepared soil. The corollary: prepare before planting the ideas in the customer's mind.

- Don't be hasty. Timing is critical. The best seed can be killed off in a late frost. Don't broadcast your ideals until the moment is right for germination.

- Excess feed doesn't help a plant. Corollary: don't push ideas too hard too early, and don't oversell.

- Despite best efforts, some of our plants are going to die. Corollary: in spite of the best efforts, learn to live with failure. Don't take it personally. "You will get ulcers, or much worse," Murray noted.

Murray delivered a famous baseball quote that it is more important to have "one thought delivered home than have three left on base."

Murray provided the ultimate definition of a successful consultant: "they invite you back," he said.

The company name, Knockroe, denotes the area in Ireland the Murray family emigrated from in the 1800s, noted Murray. The location is in the southeast County Carlow, and is a word in Anglicized Gaelic, also called Cnoc Rua, or "the red hill." With oak trees, the area in Hughesville looks like a "red hill" in the fall, noted Murray.

Also at the conference, Daney Jackson, associate dean, Penn State College of Ag Sciences, noted that Penn State stands out in its efforts to actually measure the results of extension work.

As for an administrative update, a lot depends on what happens at the state level, where the college receives funding. "It's the strangest year I've ever been through, and others say the same," Jackson noted. "It's a strange political year in Pennsylvania."

Jackson pointed out the increasing diversity of the U.S.

population, with Hispanic Americans replacing African Americans as the largest minority. And there is increasing concentration on what is happening on a global, rather than state or country, economy.

Extension and the College of Ag Sciences are going through a period of knowledge integration to develop skills for all in the "scholarship of discovery." If everybody truly appreciated the benefits of extension, quoting an Ohio State educator, "we would not have budget problems," Jackson noted.

Jackson said that the college has experienced a 22 percent increase in gifting over 2002, one of a number of critical areas helping budget the university.

In 2005, Penn State will help host the National Association of Ag Agents meeting. They are looking to generate \$60,000 in donations to cover costs.

Sept. 21-25 this year, at Galaxy II at the Salt Palace Convention Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, will be the 75th anniversary celebration of the ag agent professional organization, Epsilon Sigma Phi (ESP), according to Fay Strickler, Berks County. A donation of \$74 or more per member will help to reach the goal of \$500,000 toward the ESP Development Fund. About \$1,000 was donated by the Berks County Extension Family Living Advisory Committee, Strickler noted. Those who donate at least \$75 receive a pin in recognition.

T. David Filson, emergency coordinator for Penn State extension and regional director of the south central district of extension, spoke about extension's role in homeland security.

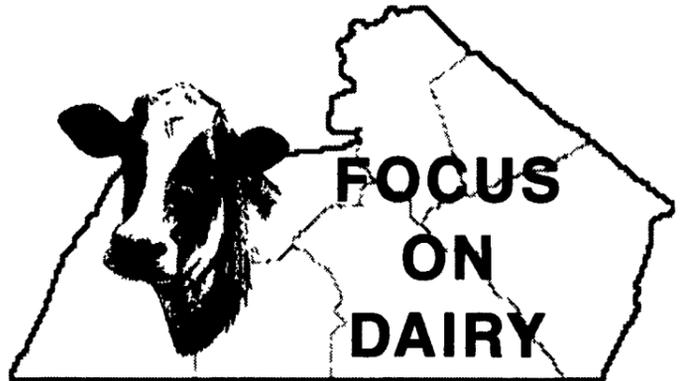
Filson spoke about "The Disaster Handbook: 1998 National Edition" published by the University of Florida Extension System, of which every county extension office is familiar with.

Filson spoke about the online survey conducted from mid-March to mid-April this year involving 102 agents regarding the importance of homeland security in agriculture.

Of the respondents, 67 percent believed there was some likelihood of an attack by terrorists in the U.S. Eighty-one percent of the respondents believed cooperative extension should be involved in emergency planning. And 91 percent believed food and ag interests should be protected.

Of the respondents, 72 percent believed that food protection was the topic of greatest concern.

Filson noted that Penn State would soon have its Website revised on disaster response plans with results of the survey at www.cas.psu.edu.



Penn State Cooperative Extension Capitol Region Dairy Team

HEAT STRESS ON DAIRY COWS

Philip E. Wagner
Extension Agent — Dairy
Franklin County

After several days of warm weather, the subject of heat stress on lactating dairy cows comes to the forefront once again.

Heat stress affects two of the most economically important segments of the dairy farm business — milk production and reproduction. Milk yield can be reduced by 3 percent to 20 percent or more. Conception can go as low as 0 percent in extreme cases. Feed intake can be reduced by 8 percent to 12 percent or more. This all translates into many lost dollars to the dairy business.

In simple terms, heat stress occurs when the cow's heat load is greater than her capacity to lose heat. Heat load is made up of her own body heat production plus environmental heat which includes air temperature, relative humidity, air movement, and solar radiation.

Cows react to heat stress in various ways. They will generally seek out shade, reduce feed intake, increase water intake, and stand rather than lie down. Respiration rate increases, rectal temperatures increase, and sweating increases. These methods allow the cow to reduce her own heat production and to transfer heat more easily to the environment.

Along with reduced feed intake, heat-stressed cows have a lower rate of feed passage and gut motility. Rumen fermentation characteristics change. Total volatile fatty acid (VFA) production is decreased. VFAs are the end product of carbohydrate microbial fermentation. Under normal circumstances, VFAs can provide up to 80 percent of the cow's energy needs. When VFA production is reduced, milk yield will suffer.

Heat stress increases maintenance requirements, which leads to decreased feed efficiency. Panting can increase a cow's maintenance requirements by 20 percent. Heat stress has little effect on milk protein percentage. However, butterfat percentage is usually reduced because of a decrease in fiber intake.

As mentioned earlier, heat stress has a negative effect on reproduction. Heat stress may damage the ovum, sperm, or embryo. There may also be an indirect effect on the uterine environment caused by changing levels of hormones. Heat detection is more difficult in heat stressed cattle because they become much less active.

The estrus period in heat stressed cows is 5-6 hours shorter than in cows under cool conditions. Early embryonic mortality is a major problem associated with heat stress. It appears that the majority of this embryonic mortality occurs within the first 7-10 days after conception.

The optimum temperature for milk production is in the range of 25-65 degrees Fahrenheit (F). However, it is temperature and humidity that determine the



Philip E. Wagner

stress level on the cow. Researchers at the University of Arizona developed the Temperature Humidity Index (THI), which is a combination of temperature and humidity. THI above 72 is usually considered the point at which heat stress occurs. As an example, the THI at 90 degrees F and 60 percent relative humidity is 83. This falls in the category between mild and severe stress.

Evaporative cooling systems should be the last step in a program to provide heat stress relief for cows. First and foremost are to cover the basics. The acronym SAW can help you remember the three basic but important points about hot weather cow care:

- *Shade* is important to protect animals from intense summer sunshine. Cows are great solar collectors. Natural shade, an artificial shade structure, or a well ventilated barn are all suitable.

- *Air flow and air exchange* are both necessary to increase the rate at which cows can remove heat from their bodies and to assure the cow has fresh air to breathe for internal cooling. High wide and open barns exposed to breezes, circulating fans inside barns, and tunnel ventilation are all methods of increasing air exchange (fresh air) and air velocity over cows.

- *Water* and plenty of it for drinking will provide the cow with additional water to evaporate and thus increase heat removal from her body. The cow will utilize water first to help cool herself through respiration moisture and sweating. Any water left over will go for milk production. Extra water locations, high capacity water lines and valves, and an adequate water supply are necessary to supply the additional water needed during hot weather.

As dairy cows are bred, fed, and managed for increasing levels of milk production, heat stress reduction management practices become a very profit-enhancing investment.

We are asking cows to produce 80-100 pounds of milk per day. Let's be sure to do our part to help relieve the stress because of heat. Take care of the basics first: shade, air flow/air exchange, and water. Then move on to evaporative cooling systems.