

The New Order of Agriculture

Problem Solvers, Facilitators, Influencers



Professional Selling

New Roles for Agri-Salespeople

Have you ever run into a friend or relative you hadn't seen for a few years and have them ask, "So, what are you doing for a living these days?"

Most salespeople when asked this question respond with something like, "Oh, I'm working in sales now." Or, "I'm a field rep for XYZ company." Or, they may simply say, "I sell stuff to farmers."

For those Field Marketers who may have given a little more thought to what they really do for a living, these people might respond with a comment such as...

"I help corn and soybean growers obtain the financing they need to maintain a profitable farm business."

Or, "I help dairy and beef producers implement a genetic and reproductive program that will enable them to breed a more profitable herd of cows."

When you think about what you do for a living, it's important to view your work as much more than just traveling up and down the road, 'selling stuff' to farmers. Yes, selling is helping! Selling is about providing solutions to customers' problems,

wants, and needs.

To stay focused on what they really do for a living, successful Field Marketers have identified three 'key roles' they fill on the increasingly complex farms they serve. They see themselves as 'problem solvers,' as 'facilitators' and as 'influencers.'



When compared to salespeople of the past, Field Marketers today have very different roles and responsibilities.

The following outlines characteristics of effective Field Marketers who are making a difference on today's farms.

Field Marketers are Problem Solvers: Ron Guzzeta, a Vineyard grower in Perrysburg, N.Y., tells us, "Farming is a business that has a new and different version of trouble every year. There are very few things under our control in farming. For this reason, if we have a salesperson who has seen my particular problem on other farms and helped solve it for someone else, he or she will be welcomed here, any time."

Judd Hanson, Sales Manager, La-Crosse, Wisc., tells us, "Today's farm owners and managers are very

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much in tune to using teams to help them solve on-farm problems. They like to get different people around the table and brainstorm ideas.”

Rick Stehr, Sales Manager, Lancaster, Pa. adds, “Serving in a problem solving role can be a little touchy. I tell the farmer, ‘When I come in here, I’m working for you. You hired me.’”

“ ‘If I see a problem on your farm, I’m going to tell you what it is and then I will come back with suggestions for improvement. You hired me to be a problem solver and that’s what I will do.’ ”

By keeping our eyes and ears open on every farm call, we not only spot problems we can solve with our own products and services, but we might also provide our clients with real value by making them aware of other specialists who can bring their problem solving expertise to the farm as well.

Bruce Weaver, Region Manager, Windber, PA., tells us, “Maybe he’s having an issue with his cropping program and needs to know somebody he can contact as an independent resource to get a second opinion on crops.

“Or, he may ask, ‘Do you know anybody at the university who can help me with a barn expansion?’ ”

Field Marketers are Facilitators. According to Ed Silba, a consultant from Asheville, N.C., “A facilitator is someone who can find different things on the farm that can

be done to make everyday life easier.”

With the high-velocity pace of activity on farms today, any supplier who can come in and spot ways to make the owner’s, manager’s, or employees’ lives easier, will be welcomed and appreciated.



Randy McCabe, a beef and crop producer from Elk City, Ka., agrees. He says, “Anything you can do to make life on this place easier and maybe result in us having a little more family time, is welcomed.”

Silba adds, “When you are out and about in the operation, constantly ask what could be done to make this farm more efficient, more profitable, or just plain easier.

“This can, however, be a little difficult at times. We all have a tendency to be shy as salespeople. If we see things that could be improved, we think we are being critical of the management on the farm. However, we are not being critical. We are assuming a leadership role when we point out things on the farm that could be improved.”

Field Marketers are Influencers. The third key role Field Marketers assume on farms today is ‘influencer.’ Earning the right to have positive influence with another person usually comes down to a few basics including that person’s integrity, their credibility and knowledge, the confidence they project and the trust they have earned.

Tom Corcoran, a crop grower from Leroy, N.Y., comments, “We look to salespeople to be ‘educators.’ Everybody who comes to the farm and has something to say is usually worth listening to. We spend a lot of hours after a salesperson leaves talking about the ideas he or she shared with us.”

Keith Johnson, a beef and crop producer from Sharon, N.D., adds, “Influence comes when a salesperson can establish a relationship. If I like them, trust them, and believe in them, they will have earned influence with me.”

Randy McCabe concludes, “I think respect has 99% to do with how much influence a salesperson has with me. Respect is not something that comes quickly. It has to be earned.”

Dr. Dave Galton, Cornell University sums up by saying, “I think agri-business has an important role on these farms if they will go to the problem solving side of the table.

“Agri-service people need to help the producer gather the data, make the analysis, give a recommendation, and then implement.”