




PHOTOS BY SAUNDRA CUMMINGSHAM



# WE CHANGE OVER TIME LEARNING FROM LIFE'S LESSONS

By PAUL D. OHLENBUSCH

All of us change as life and time provides us with opportunities and challenges. The changes occur in many ways, both good and bad. Researching and writing *Tracks* articles has been a revelation as to how my concepts and philosophies plus how I work with people changed over the years. As I think back over the years, I find the changes have helped me better understand people and how they think and function. Hopefully, the changes mostly have been positive.

Looking back, my childhood was a mix of experiences as my parents started as renters and share croppers, then my father become the farming manager for a registered Angus ranch near San Antonio. On the ranch, the kids had the opportunity to work at many different tasks. Over the years, I cleaned and straightened the shop plus cut, raked, baled, hauled, and stacked hay in the summer. Also worked on the silage crew, both cutting and hauling. Tractor work and irrigating were other experiences. "Cowboying" was another experience when I had show steers to take care of. That work paid for feed and other costs. 4-H and FFA projects were another aspect of those years. Those experiences helped me develop an appreciation for ranching, agriculture, the natural world, and hard work.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 96





There is a continuing need to educate yourself. Attending tours, meetings, and other events can provide new ideas and technology.

#### FROM PAGE 95

College taught me that there is more than “book learning” especially in everyday life. I worked 2-3 part-time jobs to pay my way. One of those was in an early “fast food” restaurant. I started as a dish washer and food prep and worked up to cook. Also, I closed the restaurant one night a week and when the owners were on vacation. Years later, we stopped by to visit the owners and found out I was the only one they found they could trust for the latter responsibilities. This taught me that trust and honesty are important and often appreciated.

During my first graduate school experience I learned not to argue with the professors if I wanted a good grade. It was my introduction to the politics of the university! There were several times that the professor lectured and it didn't fit what the current literature was pointing as new directions. This was another lesson I learned - KEEP UP TECHNICALLY!

After I finished my Master of Science degree, it was off to be a County Extension Agent in Nebraska. There, I learned a lot about working with people. Office relationships, ag operator relationships, 4-H parent interaction, and county politics, some the hard way. I will always remember the time shortly after we arrived, the

County Judge met me in the hall and strongly suggested I get my driver's licence and vehicle registration changed so he didn't have to see me in his court. He indicated that he didn't think it would look good to have the new county agent's name appear in the county court list in the local paper! I thanked him and got the job done very quickly.

I returned to Texas and worked on a sheep research project in Glasscock, Midland, Reagan, and Upton Counties. Working with ranchers, county agents, and SCS personnel (now NRCS), was an experience. Data about the sheep problem were difficult to find due to the economic problems associated with it. Eventually, several ranchers were willing to anonymously provide historical information that helped better understand the problem. Again trust and honesty were important.

It was also interesting to live in a community with more churches than bars (4 churches and 1 bar). We visited the community recently and found a new post office, but most of it was still there but most buildings were empty.

Then it was back to the university environment and the associated politics. Making grades and avoiding making enemies of faculty members as well as getting along with other graduate students was the order of the day. After

CONTINUED ON PAGE 98



FROM PAGE 96

almost 4 years, the Ph. D. was finished and it was off to Kansas State University as the Extension Range and Pasture Management Specialist and learning more about politics and relationships! With state wide responsibilities and working with state and federal organizations and agencies, all I can say is what goes on in the back room is usually the important stuff! There seemed to be 2-3 issues in the public that were dividing an organization or between organizations. If the issue was resolved, it often happened in small meetings where the issue was reviewed and acceptable resolutions were found. If this didn't happen, the differences continued in public and usually resulted in increasing divisions.

Interagency issues at the state level can lead to local splits as well. There were some and we found two ways to solve them. The best was to resolve the issue on research and experience. When that wasn't possible, moving other priority issues where there was agreement into the public realm helped. Usually, the original issue was reduced to a low level of visibility and "personal" wounds were "healed." As I look back on those issues, it was usually a couple of individuals on all sides that developed the strategy to make it happen. The goal of those who worked together was to provide landowners and operators consistent, reliable information so the their needs could be met in a relatively calm environment.

Working with landowners or operators was what I enjoyed most. Getting to know many of them on a professional, and often a personal basis, developed a relationship that was important. Watching them take information and suggestions and merging them into their operation was rewarding even if they did it in a different way. It taught me that management was the key to what made an operation succeed, flounder, or fail. An example of how this happens is one example in the November-December 2009 article about records. The continuous-cell grazing example was the result of taking a advantage of a situation when individuals were questioning how they should be grazing. Each individual involved was using different systems and wanted to know which was best. The rancher we worked with wanted to know how to tell what worked best. I suggested keeping records of time spent, materials used, and similar information might be useful. He agreed to try it for a year. Six years later, what we found was his ability to efficiently manage different systems simultaneously was the real answer, not the system used. Once we documented this, other examples of how the ability to manage was the secret to success could be identified. This includes many of the positive examples I have used in previous articles.



Information can come from popular or technical publications or reliable on-line sources. Make sure you can trust the information.

But what about those who failed? Based on my experience, the lack of flexibility, adjusting to changing weather or economic conditions, failure to keep up with technology, and other items missed or ignored contributed to their problems. An example would be the 1980's economic down turn. I was part of a team that worked with individuals on the verge of bankruptcy. There were three times I remember well. In all three cases, the creditors conditions and the individual's attitudes created a no win situation. Failure to change, "tried that and it didn't work," and similar conditions, often on the part of several parties, doomed any positive outcome.

The same approach was used in my education programs. Each program was designed to help individuals evaluate their situation and develop new management programs or adjust their current management. Promoting the latest research or product as what you should be doing may actually lead some people doing something that isn't necessary or lead to problems. Most managers are stressed trying to keep the operation functioning and profitable and don't need the pressure of hard sell tactics.

All my programs were built on being objective and timely. News releases, publications, and events were

CONTINUED ON PAGE 102





## MANAGEMENT NOTES JULY THROUGH SEPTEMBER

Water should be your highest priority. Carefully monitor late summer water sources to insure availability. Develop options if sources appear to be less than optimal. Also, begin evaluating water needs for fall.

Monitor rainfall history for the past 12 months, the forecast for the next 3-6 months, and current soil moisture status. Even if current soil moisture is good, projected plant growth may be below average if the previous growing season had drought conditions. Plan for below average growth during the rest of the 2010 growing season.

Monitor the status of grazing and browse use to date. The amount of use on highly desirable species is critical. If use is heavy, reduce use the rest of the growing season if possible and plan to reduce 2011 stocking rates to allow the preferred species to recover and improve.

Check and repair or replace any improvements such as fences, water sources, and equipment.

Continue to review the 2010 grazing and economic management budgets for 2009 and begin adjustments to the 2011 and a 5-year management plan based on current weather and current and future economic conditions.

Evaluate any broadleaf and woody plant controls applied and begin plans for 2011 broadleaf and woody plant control.

Continue evaluating the prescribed burns completed in 2010. Begin formulating burn plans for 2011.

Evaluate and continue managing 2010 seeded areas that need improvement as well as long term management.

Consider updating or starting a land resource record. If you use photographs, establish points that you can return to and photograph at least once each every year.


Above all, manage for today and the future based on what has happened in 2009, what is happening this year with the future in mind. Management is not easy! Develop a management plan if you don't have one!

## FROM PAGE 98

mostly planned up to a year in advance. Of course, there the those unplanned information things like drought, wildfire recovery, and too much precipitation. But even for these there were materials that could be updated and sent to county agents, other agencies, and the media. Add to that a working relationship with radio and TV stations around the state that would work with me when needed. I learned the use of the media from four media people who took me under their care in the first few years in Kansas. What they taught me helped more then they ever knew.

## SO, WHAT HAVE I REALLY LEARNED

Life's experiences can be positive or negative depending on how we respond to them. We can ignore them, blame someone or something else, or move forward with a new attitude. For me, many of my "lessons" developed over time. A few have been a one-time event but most have been the result of several events and little lessons over time. The latter have probably been the most important and helped create the best adjustments for me.

Probably the most important lesson has been to treat people with respect, listen to them, and suggest alternatives that appear to fit them. As I have said before, if someone tells you "All you have to do is...!" "It's the only way to do it!" and "I'm from the government and am here to help you!" be careful. Rarely do they have the real answers. You have to manage using your land, capital, labor, and management resources. You have the emotional and other resources you must manage within your abilities, not as someone else thinks you should. 



Wildlife is a part of the natural system that can be an important resource for aesthetics and economics. If this is important to you management is required.