



What's Your
MANAGEMENT
Philosophy
By Paul Ohlenbusch



DEBBIE CHISHOLM PHOTO

Over the years I worked with many managers. I have watched how each approached management of their resources. One rancher friend put together a "Ranch Philosophy" to guide his management. He believes in and lives by this philosophy. I am going to use his 12 items to suggest possible management philosophies.

Take care of the grass and/or land and it will take care of you. The land and the vegetation are the base resource for any operation that utilizes vegetation to produce income. Often, if the vegetation and/or land are damaged or degraded, costs will rise and profit will decline.

Animals work for us. We don't work for them. It can be deer, cows, ostriches, or something else. The animal must be the harvester and converter for the vegetation. The animal needs to harvest their nutrients, not be fed by hand except during extreme times!

Always breed and develop animals that fit your own environment. Never try to change the environment to fit the animal you want or have. The animal must fit the environment or be changed to an animal that does. When the animal and the environment are not matched, management is difficult, costly, and probably frustrating and inefficient.

Always try to make all impacts positive. An impact is anything you do to your resource. Think about how you can have impacts that maintain or improve your resources and situation without excessive costs. As an example, when driving in the pasture, don't follow the same trail every time. It causes less damage to the vegetation and may prevent permanent trails.

Eliminate as many moving parts and tires as possible. Many operations are over capitalized and often have equipment or other capital items that may be replaced by contract or custom

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

sources. An example would be a tractor and hay baler that is used for one week each year when a custom harvester can be utilized cheaper. While hay quality may not be as good, consider the value and cost savings.

Always deal in a win-win situation on all business ventures. Doing business today presents many challenges. Whenever possible, make sure you treat your customers and suppliers as you would like to be treated. Good relations may lead to better cost/return situations.

It's better to do nothing for nothing than something for nothing. This one seems weird, but the point is that doing a job just to do it or fill time when it doesn't add to the value or income doesn't make sense. There are costs involved and if no product or income is produced to benefit the operation, has there been a positive benefit? Better to spend the time with family, friends, or learning new information.

When diversifying, be sure that the parts complement each other. Often, managers try new enterprises because of neighbors, magazine articles, or other sources. The test for adding a new enterprise should be to ask questions such as does it use inputs and resources not being used; does it add to the efficiency and productivity of the operation; and can it be added without major land, labor, capital, and/or management inputs?

Always keep the deadwood trimmed! This philosophy comes from pruning trees! To keep fruit or other trees productive, one prunes dead, diseased, and non productive limbs or even trees. Likewise, enterprises and ventures need to be addressed similarly. If an enterprise in the operation isn't profitable or

competes for resources better utilized in another enterprise, consider eliminating it.


Be proactive in your community. Support your family and community. Be involved. Be positive in your dealing, active in groups, and help build your family and community.

Holistically minded, sustainably driven, and profit oriented. Approach everything you do by looking at the total of the situation to improve it over time and make the future profitable. Everything changes over time and management needs to keep up to date.

Last but not least, enjoy what you're doing. This is the most important philosophy to live by. If you are not happy in what you are doing, will you really do your best?

This rancher was raised in town and worked summers on farms and ranches for relatives. He has built an operation of about 6,000 acres, almost all rented or leased. At one point he was facing heavy debt but began developing these "Ranch Philosophy" guidelines. Today, he is profitable and continues to look for new opportunities to add or to remove older ones as times change.

Developing one's management philosophy requires knowing what you have, knowing your financial status, continually evaluating resources and weather, and other factors.

Next time: An example of changing directions - can cattle grazing improve deer habitat? 

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