Incorporating Consulting Into Veterinary Practice

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Abstract

Our advice is important to every operation for which we provide consultation. Helping our clients make the right decision is not solely dependent on our ability to provide a logical analysis of all the factors that affect the current situation, but also on our ability to show the value, personal benefits and possible ramifications of utilizing the advice. The best advice possible has no value if we cannot help our clients understand it and make timely decisions concerning the welfare of their operation.

In my work in advising clients in the area of personnel management, manager coaching and professional development, transfer of the business to the next generation, and achieving higher production goals, it has become extremely important for me to help owners and managers alike make tough decisions. Though they understand the logic involved in the decision, emotion sometimes clouds the process and evokes hesitation. Many times our clients know that they must make a change, but tradition, habit, fear of failure and a natural resistance to change get in the way. This hesitation is only exacerbated by the emotions of depression, confusion and grief from extended financial distress.

An advisory methodology that incorporates an appreciation for these factors with an understanding of the emotional implications will provide greater success. Additionally, this appreciation will enhance a sense of camaraderie among all the decision-makers involved in the process.

Introduction

Frankly, we are most likely to take advice from people we consider friends. We need to remember this fact when we give advice. For us to maximize our influence in the decision-making and advisory role, we need to enhance our level of friendship in key relationships. With all our "high tech" communications (fax, cell phone, voice mail, e-mail, etc.), we have less opportunity for "high touch" interaction. It is this high touch type of communication that has the greatest bearing on our ability to develop strong relationships.

This paper will focus on some key factors that affect our ability to develop relationships in our ever increasing high tech society.

Improving Rapport

Our busy schedules tend to force us to make fast paced visits through the operations and limit our conversations with staff and key decision makers. It is great for efficiency in data collection and visual inspection, but it is counter-productive when it comes to the decision phase. The reason? We simply don't develop a level of rapport and understanding with the staff. Rapport is critical when there are emotional diversions affecting the decision process. By developing a high level of rapport, we gain a higher level of trust and respect, which rewards us with a higher level of influence at decision time.

To gain this level of rapport we need to understand the key factors affecting communications—physiological factors (similar to body language), tonality factors and verbal factors. Physiological factors make up 55% of communications, tonality is 38%, and verbal factors account for only 7%.

Since verbal factors account for such a small percentage of communications, let's deal with it first. That's right, the words we use are the least significant part of a conversation. The reason for this is simple. Our brains are complex and have the ability to take in tremendous amounts of inputs at the same time. Words are simple to listen to, and we easily catch most of the important words of a conversation even if we barely pay attention.

Tonality is our inflection, volume, tone and speed. Its effect on a conversation is powerful due to its ability to hold our attention and maintain our curiosity. Its most significant influence on communications is that when used properly, it gives us the opportunity to emphasize the key parts of our advice. Without tonality, our words are a monotone, boring and redundant diatribe that gives our listener a sense that they'd rather be doing something else! If we use fewer words and apply greater inflection we'll significantly improve the effectiveness of our conversation.

Physiology is our body motions, stance, hand gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, etc. Physiology is powerful in conversation. Our complex brains, in their search for definitive input in a conversation, use these inputs as their key resource. In an exchange, we look for signs of familiarity. Have you ever wondered why there are some people that we meet and within a few minutes we feel like we have known them all our lives—that we have much in common and they are someone we would appreciate getting to know? That's physiology. Have you had a time when you were certain that you fully understood what someone else was saying and you could anticipate their next words? Again—physiology.

Physiology gets its power from simple gestures that the brain recognizes as familiar. When we see others stand, speak, move and gesture as we do, it sends a signal to our brain: "They are like me!" People are much more comfortable in discussions if we mirror and match their motions, tonality and posture. To fully clarify this point, consider the opposite. If the person we are in conversation with is sitting in a chair leaning back with their arms crossed, and we are standing, talking to them while looking out a window—how well are we communicating? Obviously, we are not communicating at all and the most perfect choice of words will not improve the situation. This is an extreme example, but it proves the point. If we desire the highest level of communication possible, we need to relate at a physiological level. When our time is limited and our need for trust is high, there is no better way to improve that efficacy than by mirroring the motions and physical actions of the person we are communicating with—without mimicking them or following them exactly. As we mirror, we need to be certain that we are not exaggerating their movements and tone. We simply need to stand, use hand gestures, match the tone and speed of their speech, and be certain we are using words that match the ones they are familiar with.

Michael Brooks, in his book *Instant Rapport* says, "When we mirror people, through matching their behavior, we're offering them not only visible and subconscious images of themselves, but images that are delivered without our meanings attached to them. In other words, people are seeing themselves without our comments about them. This frees them to drink in their personal likeness and connect their own unconscious meaning to it, as we all do. The nifty part of all this is that as we become more and more like the people we're mirroring, we build more rapport." [3]

Mirroring and matching is critical when we are explaining the importance of our advice in a particular area. If we need to be certain that they are getting the information correctly, we need to raise the level of rapport through our physical actions. If the person we are speaking with speaks slowly, they are telling us they process vocabulary slowly. It doesn't mean they aren't intelligent, it just means they are methodical about their choice of words. We need to match that speed. If the person tends to lean back, make direct eye contact or use a lot of hand gestures, we need to do the same. If an individual does not like to make eye contact, it is very uncomfortable for them if every time they look back at us, we're making eye contact. In this situation, we need to use eye contact sparingly.

When seated at a table, posture is extremely important. If our listener is leaning forward, elbows on the table with their eyes making direct contact, we have their attention! If at this point we were to lean back, cross our legs and put our hands behind our head, we'd lose them and send the signal that we're distracted or even bored with the discussion. In getting to know someone for the first time, as many of us do in operations where turnover is higher than ideal, we need to maximize the principles of mirroring and matching. Our first contact can send the signal that "I like this person" or "This guy's okay; I'll pay attention to him." If we mirror and match their motions, tonality and posture, we send that important signal, "This person is like me!"

Don Gabor, in his simple yet superb book, *How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends,* sums up the important elements of conversation in this way; S-O-F-T-E-N. This acronym stands for S-smile, O-open posture (don't cross your arms too often), F-forward lean (you'll pay better attention and show your own interest), T-touch (just a hand shake or a simple pat on the back as you leave), E-eye contact, N-nod.[2]

Personality Differences

One of the toughest lessons that we had to learn in kindergarten was that some people are very different! They didn't like the things we liked, they didn't want to do what we liked to do, and sometimes they didn't even understand what we said. In these introductory communications lessons we soon learned that it was easier to communicate with people like us. They became our friends. We were comfortable with them and they were comfortable with us.

Unfortunately, professional consulting doesn't allow us the luxury of only interacting with people in which we share common interests. Additionally, as we fast forward to today's high-tech communications systems—e-mail, faxes, cell phones, voice mail, etc.—we spend very little time in face-to-face communications. The net result is that our communication skills suffer and don't get the opportunity to develop as effectively as the workplace demands.

How much more effective would your advice be if everyone understood exactly what you were saying—all the time?

Understanding different people is quite easy for individuals that work with livestock on a regular basis. They already have the observation skills. The problem is that we just need for someone to help us understand where to look and what to look for! Here are the basics of this simple approach: people have two factors that determine their focus and direction. One factor is best described as a "motor", the other a "compass." The motor determines whether a person is fast or slow-paced. Some individuals think, talk and work quickly, while others are more methodical in their approach. The other

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element, a person's compass, gravitates him/her to either focusing on people or focusing on the task at hand.

Once we understand this, we have a lot of insight into how the person will respond. We know how they are going to act, how we should give instructions, what kinds of words to use, how fast to talk, how much time to spend with them and where our focus should be when we talk with them. For example a fast-paced, task oriented person may only need basic instruction to complete a task. They like to take action almost immediately, even before they have all the information. Staying on schedule may be important to this individual, and if they spend too much time re-discussing old information it will frustrate them. They like a challenge and need to have a high level of control in their daily schedule and duties. Making decisions tends to be easy for them, and they will tend to "take charge" if no one else seems to be in authority. We would consider these to have a "dominant" personality style.

Slower paced, task-orientated people will be more methodical in their approach to their work and the way they make decisions. The advice we give them needs to reflect their speed and focus. They will appreciate more detail and will want to know the logical reasons for any changes in established protocols. Research and facts are key parts of their decision-making process. They appreciate value and quality in their answers. These individuals thrive in an environment that needs strict attention to detail with specific rules and procedures to follow. We would consider these to have a "cautious" personality style.

Now if we point the compass toward people orientation, interaction with others is more important. The faster-paced, people-oriented individual needs regular contact with other people to stay focused. They prefer an environment with significant variety during their work day. If they don't get enough human interaction, they'll talk your ear off every chance they get! Though they may have some trouble staying focused, these people are very valuable and accomplish a significant amount of work when properly directed. These "inspirational" personalities keep mundane work enjoyable, are always in motion and show a sincere desire to please us. They need our recognition and approval on a consistent basis.

Finally, our slower-paced, people oriented employees tend to be focused on the people and livestock around them. They like to make sure that everything is being dealt with on a fair basis. We will regularly hear them ask if we discussed any changes with everyone else that could be affected. These folks thrive on caring for stock that need special attention. They may not be as quick, but they are sincere, stable individuals who get the job finished correctly. People with this "steady" personality style need security, consistency and a systematic approach in their work and the decisions that they make. As advisors, we need to give them our personal support and sincere appreciation on a regular basis. Once this person makes a decision and has confidence in our abilities, they will be a loyal client for many, many years.

These four personality groups provide a framework for us to begin understanding people. Though there are several good personality profiling tools available to give us a complete understanding of communications, this simple understanding of human behavior can provide us with the basic elements of interacting with others. No one is purely one specific personality style. We are all blends of the elements of each.

Here are some tips on using this basic knowledge in our daily interactions with our clients:

"Dominant" clients

They need to be in control, so don't make decisions for them. Let them come to conclusions on their own. You can be very direct with them and challenge them to make a decision. If they are hesitant to decide, remind them that other producers have used this advice (or product) and that you wouldn't want them to miss out on an opportunity or lose a competitive advantage.

"Cautious" clients

These clients will make their decisions on their own schedule. They will take the most time to decide and will need the most information. Slick brochures don't mean anything to them, but pages and pages of research results with facts and figures will have a great impact. Give them the information and let them review it on their own. They have their own way of analyzing data and need time alone to go through the process. Let them know when you will follow up with them—but be ready for hard questions! If you don't help them see the logical benefits of making a decision in the very near future, they will drag out the decision forever.

"Inspirational" clients

Be sure to have fun when you speak with them. They need to know that you are their friend and that you don't take life too seriously. You may need to help them stay focused on the topic. You may even need to remind them of what you talked about last time! When helping them make decisions, focus on the emotional component of the decision. You can probably just gloss over the research. They'll take your brochure—and lose it—wishing they had read it before you asked them about it! If they are slow to decide, tell them about the other producers they know personally that have made this decision or are using the new product or procedure. Remember that they are easily influenced by other people, and would like to be in a position of influence.

"Steady" clients

Be patient with these clients. They don't do anything fast, and will be more interested in how you are doing than in how their own business is going. Get the

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personal conversations out of the way first. Tell them about your kids, your family and what you have been up to lately. Show an interest in their family and other personal issues. They don't like to make rapid or significant changes, especially when other people are involved. You may have to help them see that the other people affected by these changes will benefit as well. If the other people will save time or enjoy their job more, be sure to focus on that element of the advice. Remember that once they make a decision, they will stick with it. If you can position yourself as a trusted advisor, they will be your most loyal client.

Table 1 outlines the basic tendencies of each personality type and how they will respond in certain situations. It also includes their basic mannerisms and how to identify their type through simple observations.

Generational Differences

Differences in age are playing a much more important role in the workplace. In times past, age had a significant correlation to position and title. The older workers had the greatest amount of authority and experience, younger workers developed those talents over time and slowly gained the experience necessary to earn the higher levels of responsibility. Two things have significantly changed this process—the high employment rate and the infusion of technology.

In the next five years demographers estimate that there will be 19 million new jobs created but there will only be 14 million new workers available to fill them. Too many jobs, not enough workers. The current situation will not change for many years. Operations that differentiate themselves from the local businesses and from other similar operations will have a tremendous edge in attracting the best workers.

This shortage has forced new employees to have greater responsibility at a faster pace, and usually with less and less training. The basic pay rate to even get someone to consider a position is more than many of the older generation made after years and years of service. This can create bitterness between older and younger workers, even though the situation was not created by either one of them. It's simply the outcome of a "high-tech" economy with limited new workers. The challenge comes when younger and older generations work in the same environment side-by-side and have very similar responsibilities.

This difference in perception of the workplace is created almost purely by societal influences during development as a youth. The War-era generation, born in the 1920s and 1930s, experienced the Great Depression and its after-effects. They experienced abject poverty firsthand and for many of the young men who entered WWII, they enlisted as much for the food and clothes as they did out of a sense of duty. In Tom Brokaw's book *The Greatest Generation,* Bob Dole remembers, "It was a good deal; you got a good pair of boots, three meals a day, new clothing, a new rifle. It was the most many young Americans had ever had."[3] That perspective is significantly different than the social situations that many of today's new workforce grew up in.

Consider the difference between today's Baby Boomers (born roughly from 1945 to 1965) and Generation X-ers (born generally between 1965 and 1985). The Gen-X generation has been entering the workforce since the mid 1980s, and their perception of what the workplace should be is becoming very clear. Their preferred workplace needs to be very socially oriented with a lot of time for interaction. They want to bring their personal problems to work with them and get advice from their friends. Family time is extremely important and must be balanced with work time. Technology is something they grew up with, so they can't understand why their older counterparts are slow to appreciate and adapt new technology. Boomers measured social status with cars, expensive vacations and stuff they could touch and hold. Gen-Xers measure status with computer power, personal time and investments. Boomers see Gen-Xers as self-centered and uncommitted to their work. Gen-Xers tend to see Boomers as materialistic workaholics.

In my research and personal interaction with a wide variety of people in all these generations, there is one thing that is very consistent. Every generation sees the next older generation as slow to adapt to change, unwilling to utilize new technology and less concerned with important social issues. Every generation also sees the next younger generation as forcing change too fast, too hung up on new technology, and lacking an appreciation for the improvements in society that "MY" generation has made. There's really no difference, regardless of age. Sixty-year-olds still think that 80-year-olds are too slow to adapt to change, and that 40-year-olds try to change things too fast! It's an interesting contradiction, regardless of the age involved.

So how do we appreciate these differences and incorporate them into our advisory process? Here are some tips for working with each generation:

War-era - appreciate their sense of duty and commitment, recognizing their sense of history and their tenacity when others would be overwhelmed. Let them know that you recognize their contribution as the foundation for building many of the businesses that are here today. If you want to build rapport with them, just ask them about their early years and how things "used to be." You'll get more information than you needed, but you will have made a significant investment in their relationship with you.

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Boomer's - appreciate their hard work, devotion to their job, and the knowledge they have acquired over time. Recognize that they may be less appreciative of new technology, especially in communication, so personal phone calls can make a significant impact on your relationship. All of our clients appreciate hand-written notes on reports, but our Boomer-age clients will put more value in them. Boomers prefer matter-of-fact advice that will help the business to improve over time, based on facts and logic. As a rule, they are less concerned than their

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Table 1. Tendencies of different personalities.

Outward Characteristics	**Dominant**	**Influencing**	**Steady**	**Cautious**
Dress:	Expensive In control	Stylish Bright colors	Simple Comfortable	Coordinated Conservative
Posture:	Controlled	Relaxed	Comfortable	Rigid/poised
Conversation:				
Speed	Fast	Very fast	Slow	Very slow
Volume	Loud	Louder	Soft	Quiet
Quantity	Plenty	Abundant	Some	Very little
Silence	Very little	None	Some	Abundant
Hand gestures	Plenty	Abundant	Some	Very little
Style	Assertive	Name dropper	We/group	Factual/specific
General Interaction with Others				
Decisions:	Results-oriented	Involvement—"I"	Stability—"WE"	Analytical/facts
Decision speed:	Fast (on Facts)	Quick	Indecisive Hesitant	Methodical Needs more info
Openness:	Direct/to the point	Very open/ talkative	Reserved/beats around the bush	Closed Selective
Urgency:	Extreme	Plenty	Little	Very little
Workplace Interactions				
Conflicts:	Argumentative	Verbalizes all opinions	Dislikes conflict/ will avoid	Argues facts and logic/rules
Emotions:	Some outbursts	Excitable	May or may not hide emotions	Very little shown
Focus:	Long term / big picture	Big picture	Small issues	Specifics Details
Interactions:	Some	Abundant	Plenty	Very little
Change:	Causes change	Likes change	Dislikes—must be fair to everyone	Dislikes—must be logical
Organization:	"I have my own system"	Very little	Some /practical	Plans/uses many lists
How you should				
Praise:	Focus on job done well and on time	Focus on interaction with others	Focus on assistance to others	Focus on job done accurately and completely
Correct:	Focus on desired result	Focus on expectations	Focus on fairness	Focus on logic and facts
Train:	Explain and then "Hands Off"	Lots of personal interaction	Supportive	Explain "Why" and give details

younger counterparts about any personal criticism that they may feel while discussing changes that need to be made. They get much of their personal satisfaction from work, so if work gets better, they feel better.

Generation X-ers - appreciate them as a person, how well they get along with others, and above all else, get to know them personally. Ask them questions about their family and interests. Be genuinely interested in what they do with their time off, where they go on vacations, and the kinds of activities they enjoy with their friends and family. Of course, this type of interaction is important in any relationship, but for Generation X-ers it is their focus in life. Unless you show an interest in them personally, your ability to influence their work activity will be minimal. The best way to accomplish this is to take the time, especially during walk-throughs, to talk with them for just a little while about them personally. "How are the kids?", "What did you do last weekend?", "Did I see one of your kids' names on the sports page?", etc. are simple questions that can lead to a higher level of rapport and a significant show of appreciation for them personally. If you struggle with how to start these conversations, remember the acronym F-O-R-M. Ask questions from these categories: F-family, O-occupation, R-recreation, M-message or miscellaneous. Remember, Gen X-ers tend to be even more anti-establishment than their Boomer parents, so bridging this gap through personal interest is essential.

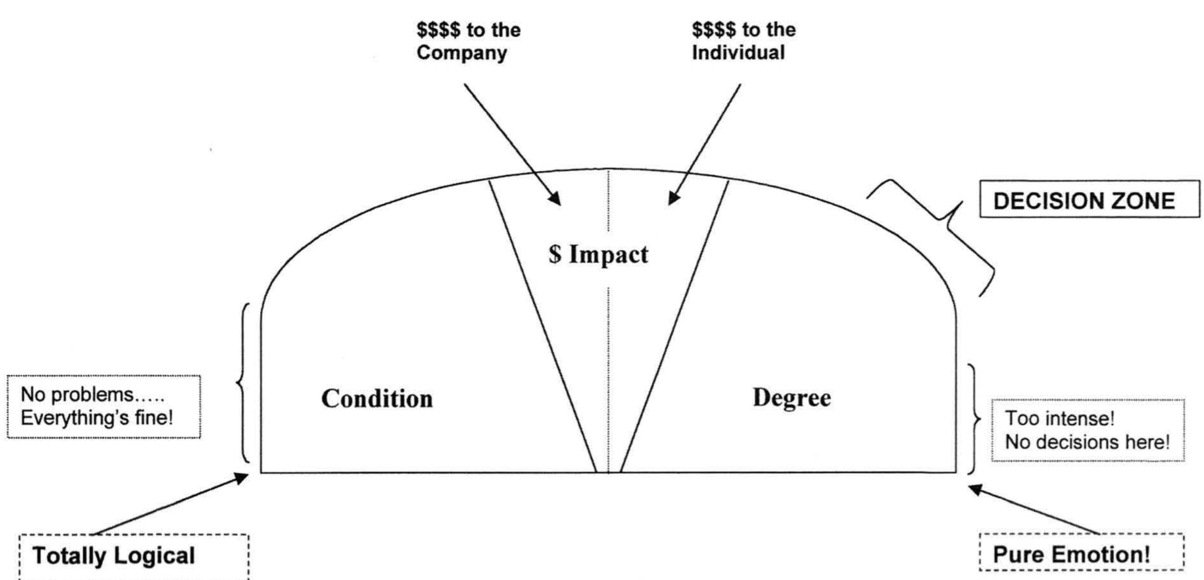
Additionally, the new workforce wants their workplace to be free of conflict and personal criticism. Praise is a powerful tool, even if it is done privately. This younger generation prefers very clear-cut goals and expectations because their self-confidence is somewhat lower and they have a hard time evaluating themselves. With clear goals and production targets, staff members can see for themselves that they are on track, and most importantly, the other staff members know "I'm doing my job".

In general, Generation X prefers a workplace that is interactive, personable, free of conflict, goal oriented, clearly defined with policy manuals and operating procedures, appreciative of personal time and free of opinionated debate.

The Decision-Making Process and Personalizing Your Advice

When you get to the point that you know with great confidence exactly what needs to be done and you have provided all the facts and figures to back up your advice, but the key people won't make the decision, try something different. Personalize the outcome of the de-

Table 2. Model for the emotional part of the decision-making process.



- What are some conditions that your clients are facing now or in the near future?
- What are some things that your clients want for themselves or their families that would make them change what they are currently doing? (Recognize that if a person will not make a decision based on logic and factual information, then they need an emotional reason to make the decision. Help them connect a decision that needs to be made—and the financial reward—to something that would give them emotional satisfaction.)
- How can you help them see that you can address those needs and be a part of the process of achievement?

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cision. It's a simple process that takes some boldness, but yields the benefit that you know you have done all that you can to influence a decision. Since logic hasn't worked, use some emotional posturing.

After you have shown the bottom line in dollars or time (or both) with sincerity and concern, ask them "This extra revenue that could be realized.......is this enough money for us to fix the problem?" In most all cases they will agree, unless you are after a very small, low financial impact improvement. Next ask, "If this is worth fixing, what do you think a good business person like yourself would spend to fix this size of a problem?" The typical response is, "We don't have the money", but you can easily bring them back to the cost/benefit of your advice. After this is re-iterated—again with sincerity and concern—ask them, "If we could get this money, what would you do with the extra money?" Most will say that they will pay bills, maybe do something with family, or upgrade a piece of equipment. With this information you can then ask, "Is being able to (get that item or do that with your family, etc.) worth the possibility that we can make this work?" Again, sincerity is everything here. Realize that you have given them something very personal to consider, so wait patiently for an answer. You have taken a business situation and attached it to a personal desire. When done with sincerity, you won't offend them or make them too uncomfortable. Remember, you won't pull this off unless you have a high level of rapport and a fairly solid relationship. In fact, it may take two, three or four meetings before the key people fully grasp what you are trying to help them see. Keep in mind that your objective is to do this for their operation—you're doing them a favor by clarifying some key reasons to make changes and take your advice.

Table 2 provides a simple model for the emotional part of the decision-making process. The left part of the graph is the logical part of decision-making, the right section is the emotional process. Notice that the "decision zone" is in the emotional section. Some people can make purely logical decisions, especially when it comes to their business. It is important to realize that unless the emotional part of the decision-making process is included in the final decision, there is a real possibility that they will change their decision when additional information, or more accurate information is presented.

The "impact" section of the graph is where people "feel" the affects of making a decision. The effect on the company is less powerful than the affect on the individual. This is where emotion comes into play. Though many of our clients are emotionally attached to their businesses, they are more apt to be emotionally attached to their family or other areas that are more personal in nature. The degree to which a person feels the emotion is the right part of the graph. We don't want to push people too far into the emotional section. If so, they may make a hasty decision, and then change their mind at a later date.

Decisions are best made in the middle of the emotional section. This section is past the area where we have shown them the impact on their company and on them personally. Once they have tied the decision they must make to some personal, emotional benefit, they will easily adapt the changes and follow through on the decisions they have made.

Keep in mind that many of our clients make good, adult, business decisions. We don't need to take them through the emotional elements of the decision-making process to get them to utilize our advice. Incorporating the emotional elements of the decision process provides a solution for those clients who are reluctant to take our advice, even though we are confident of the results. Adding this process to our consultations will help us to provide a more thorough service to our clients and will help our clients achieve more than they ever thought they could.

Summary

Improving rapport, understanding generational differences and personality differences, and recognizing the emotional component of the decision-making process are just a few of the key factors that affect our ability to communicate our advice to key decision-makers and the staff of the operations we consult. In this age of ever-increasing "high tech" communications, we will set ourselves apart as being the most sought after consultants if we master the more "high touch" elements of communications. In the toughest of financial times, our clients need us to provide them with not only timely and appropriate advice, but also the motivation and persuasion to make the decision that will keep their operations competitive.

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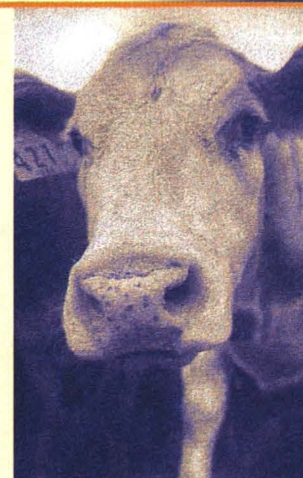

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