

News Column

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LOW STRESS STOCKMANSHIP

Working cattle with my dad was always an adventure. Long before anyone coined the phrase “low stress stockmanship”, I knew all about the other way of doing things. We didn’t have a name for it then, but today I would call it high stress cattle handling,...with the stress being much greater on the handlers than on the cattle.

Sorting cattle with Dad was stressful because I knew I was going to get yelled at. In his younger days, Dad was pretty intense. When it was time to move, it was time to move NOW. If I didn’t react quickly enough, the volume got louder. If loud didn’t work,.....well, then he might swear a little.

For the record, Dad mellowed a bunch as he aged, and when he got old enough that he couldn’t outrun the cows, we got a little smarter about how we handled them. Now, he’s either not as bad as I thought he was when I was a child, or I’m so much like him that I just want to think that he’s OK. I’m not really sure which is true.

As I see it now, we had two problems with our cattle handling system – facility design and attitude. The way things were laid out, we had a few places where we had to push cattle through a gate where they didn’t want to go. And, we had the attitude that we could do it,...if we just pushed a little harder or yelled a little louder.

I never suffered anything worse than a severe bruise from a good sharp kick to the shin (yes, Dad taught me to get close enough to get kicked in the shins instead of some place higher),

but Dad endured a couple of injuries that were a bit more serious. The two that I remember most distinctly are the busted face that sent him to the emergency room, and an apparent broken foot from getting mad and kicking a cow. The foot went undiagnosed, but he limped for at least a month.

Better facility design may or may not have prevented my dad's injuries. Attitude, on the other hand, probably would have made a difference. Slowing down and remaining calm is always a good plan. That said, how do you think it would have gone if I had told dad to chill when he was at peak intensity?

RCLA Spring Meeting – March 31

Low Stress Stockmanship will be the topic of Justin Waggoner's presentation at the Riley County Livestock Association Spring Meeting, scheduled for 6:30 p.m on Thursday, March 31. Waggoner is the Southwest Kansas Extension Livestock specialist and has agreed to swing through Manhattan after attending livestock meetings in southeast Kansas for a couple of days right before coming here.

Implementing low stress stockmanship principles requires a couple of things, facilities that work, and people who know how to work within their facilities. Waggoner will talk about both facility layout and handling techniques, but I expect more time spent discussing how to handle cattle than on building newer and better pens.

The RCLA Spring Meeting will be held at the Fairview Church Fellowship Hall, just across the intersection from Riley County High School. The cost is \$10 per person and includes a beef dinner catered by Vathauer Catering. Reservations are needed by March 28 and may be made online at www.riley.ksu.edu.

If you have questions you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-

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