

## COMMUNICATING THE VALUE OF EXTENSION

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First of all, I want to tell you how much I appreciate the high honor you have bestowed on me. It is indeed humbling to be selected to receive the Distinguished Service Ruby Award. I am aware of many of those who have preceded me as recipients of this prestigious award, which makes me even more humble and grateful. I am reminded of an anonymous quote I came across recently that I think best expresses my sentiments regarding this award and also relates to what all of us do in our Extension work.

"People will forget what you say. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel."

I want to assure all of you that you have made me feel "extra special" by honoring me with the Distinguished Service Ruby Award. Furthermore, I assure you that I will continue to try to do my best for the Cooperative Extension System in the tough days ahead as we struggle to gain greater visibility and greater public support. And that is what this meeting and its theme are all about.

I was so intrigued by the theme that I decided to focus my comments this evening on that very topic. I know that there will be a number of others addressing this topic over the next several days, so I hope that my comments will fit in and support what is to follow.

However, before getting into this subject, let me assure you that I stand before you as a product of Cooperative Extension. As a nine-year-old, I was a 4-H club member and remained so for the next ten years. My parents were volunteer leaders for a combined total of over 40 years. County Extension Agents Bill Bex, Lewis Haydock and Bill Sallee were instrumental in encouraging and challenging me to dream and then to make the dreams come true. For a shy lad from rural Oklahoma to be privileged to have the many learning and leadership opportunities, including a college tuition scholarship, is phenomenal. So, you can understand why I can get so emotional about the value and impact of the Cooperative Extension System.

Extension is an organization that takes great, justifiable pride in its past. For over 80 years, the federal, state, and local partnership linked through land-grant universities has had impressive accomplishments. We honor those who created strong farm organizations, built the 4-H program, and educated rural women through Extension organizations. Through continuing viable educational programs and community leadership training, Extension has reached a broad segment of the nation's population (although many have not recognized from whence the assistance came). Through its programs, Extension has developed more highly educated and more effective leaders. With financial management and educational links to county judges, commissioners, and other local elected officials, Extension has built a formidable support base for its programs. Extension has changed the lives of our citizens and their communities in significant, positive ways. That is our past, a strong foundation. It is a legacy with which I am honored to be associated.

But, I would be less than honest if I did not admit that the present and future concern me most, excite me most, and elate me most as I see the challenges and opportunities that are ours for the taking. Furthermore, I admit to becoming impatient with too many nostalgic remembrances. Those wonderful people who built this Extension system gave us a powerful, respected, responsive educational organization that has made a difference.

That brings us to today and our challenge at hand. Communicating the value of Extension! Boy, that is a challenge if I ever saw one! You know, we unconsciously do this virtually every day. We talk to each other about what we're doing to help people help themselves. We brag about our exploits -- all the good we're doing to help farmers and ranchers, consumers, youth, families, and on and on. We also put this information in our monthly and annual reports. We're proud of what we do!

So why don't our publics, our stakeholders, our elected officials and other key decision makers provide the kind of support that we feel we deserve? I am in complete agreement with Dr. Patrick Boyle in his paper Building Political Support for Extension in the 21st Century

-- "Many political decision makers are interested in and supportive of programs that can make a contribution to the future -- to national and state priorities, relevant economic and social issues. Historical contributions and values are of little interest. Since politicians are faced with decisions about the future, Extension must recognize that the future is the basis for building political support." Boyle adds: "Extension must come to understand the political environment of the '90's and determine how to effectively build support and influence this new culture. Extension has no control over the availability of state and federal resources or the competition from mandated programs. Extension can only control its competitive position in the changing political environment."

In today's world of downsizing government -- or some prefer to call it "rightsizing" -- the challenge is greater than it has ever been. We must fight for every dollar -- and there are few to go around. So what's the answer? How do we go about our business differently so that we can garner greater public support?

I believe we simply aren't aggressive enough in doing our homework and delivering the Extension message to those who make decisions about our funding, etc. I'm reminded of a quote by Arthur Godfrey that points to our dilemma: "Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there," or the quote of the famous philosopher, Casey Stengel, "You will never steal second with a foot on first."

I believe Extension has been on the right track for years in addressing critical issues that affect our customers. However, in many cases we have been run over by those who do not understand what we are about. Why? Because too many times we have been sitting on the track rather than moving out aggressively to communicate about our programs and our accomplishments. We have been reluctant to "blow our own horn" because we have felt that all we had to do was good educational programs and everything else would fall into place.

Three years ago John Paluzek, president of Ketchum Public Affairs, addressed a joint meeting of ECOP-ESCOP in which he stated that Cooperative Extension and the land-grant university system were suffering from a 'reputation deficit.' I have to agree with him. We are not well known over much of the country, particularly in the more urban areas. "Extension" is not a household word. I believe that is our challenge. We must work to become a household word, particularly in urban areas where the political base is the greatest. How do we accomplish this massive task? Yoggi Berra: "You can observe a lot by just looking" or "If you come to a fork in the road, take it."

I believe the answer lies in documenting our successes and then communicating them to the appropriate decision makers. Documentation. Documentation is the first step. It's no longer a matter of just keeping a few notes. Today documentation must be a major effort if we in Extension are to show accountability for the use of public funds. That means that we must build evaluation into our educational programs so that we can document changes, impacts etc. And we must do that documentation all the way up the line--at the community level, at the county level, at the state level and at the federal level. We must show that we are making a difference in the lives of people, that we are having a positive impact!

In Texas we were forced to pay more attention to evaluation and documentation when the state legislature initiated performance-based budgeting in 1991. We have worked hard at this, and I believe we are making progress. We have gotten our Extension faculty to think through their programming efforts with regard to evaluating "impact" and documenting that impact. I know we are in better shape than some other Texas state agencies who were not accustomed to evaluating and documenting programs and activities.

As most of you know, the federal government is going to a similar system in 1997 when the GPRA (Government Performance Results Act) goes into affect. Cooperative Extension was called on several years ago to launch a pilot effort to develop a model for implementing GPRA. Seven states are involved.

I mention these two cases because they are clear indications of what we in Extension are dealing with today and will be even more so in the future.

Communication. As I mentioned earlier, it's no longer just enough to tell our coworkers, our neighbors, the folks at the coffee shop and so on about our efforts, our successes. We must make sure that those involved in decision making get the information. That means our county board of directors (in Texas we have county commissioners' courts), our mayors and other local government officials, our state legislators, and, or course, those serving in Washington.

We must communicate with all of these individuals on a regular basis, not just during budget time or when the legislature is in session. We must make special efforts to

communicate what we are doing and what impact we are having. You know all the vehicles that we can use—written reports, brochures, video tapes, information days, open houses, field days, tours, etc. I really like field days and tours for elected officials because such events enable them to see results firsthand. And, the officials like these types of events because they get them out among the people, their constituents.

A key factor in communicating Extension results/impacts to legislators is to involve volunteers rather than Extension professionals. Field days, tours and similar events offer excellent opportunities for individuals impacted by Extension programs to tell their stories. Select key individuals who have been impacted by Extension programs and ask them to "carry the ball for you." Their personal testimony can be much more effective than anything we as Extension professionals can communicate.

I also believe that it is critically important for county Extension faculty to be involved in briefing elected officials. I must tell you about an incident at a budget hearing with Texas legislators this spring. I was prepared to the hilt to discuss our programs when I was interrupted by one of our urban legislators from Travis County. She immediately began to tell other legislators about the Extension program in Travis County and all the good things that were happening. All I did was sit back and enjoy the moment. That happened not because of anything I did but because the Travis County Extension folks had done their job in communicating to her what Extension was doing. It's much like basketball, you cannot score unless you shoot. Hockey great, Wayne Gretzky said, "You miss 100% of the shots you never take."

Shaping the Future. I believe we have the opportunity to shape the future of Cooperative Extension as never before. We are part of a unique partnership that brings together county, state and federal government entities to address the critical needs of individuals, their families and their communities. We must tell our customers and our stakeholders what we can do for them. Then we must perform to the best of our abilities. But it doesn't end there. We must also document what we've done and then communicate the facts to decision makers. We must tell them what we've done for them and their constituents today and what we plan to do tomorrow. We must open the umbrella. Someone said -- the mind is like an umbrella -- it only works when it's open. It has been suggested that integrity is on the endangered species list. Lack of trust of public institutions is not uncommon. Extension and Extension employees must present an image of unquestionable integrity and trustworthiness.

Now a weighty issue for all Extension. It is obvious to me that Extension faculty do not participate as teams. Many spend most of their time criticizing their colleagues and programs not in their specialty area. I believe we then are having to spend most of our "thinking," "dreaming" and "communicating" time doing repair work. Why do some of our colleagues treat the Extension organization as a paper shredder treats a document? "Why do pigs corner up in the pen in the winter....to keep each other warm or to keep themselves warm?"

To accomplish all we need to do requires working together as a team within the Extension System. That means all of us pulling together. Our strength is in our unity, not in our differences. The bottom line is that we must have a winning attitude. Henry Ford said, "If you think you can, you can. If you think you can't, you can't. Either way you are right." We must be leaders. I know people in leadership who couldn't lead a silent prayer -- couldn't organize a two car funeral procession. We must have a reaffirmation of an educational system in which people (faculty) have a responsibility for each other.

Dee Hock, founder and CEO emeritus of VISA USA and VISA International, in his 1995 paper in "World Business Academy Perspectives", stated, "It is no failure to fall short of realizing all that we might dream. The failure is to fall short of dreaming all that we might realize."

My aspiration for all of us is to be part of a winning team. With a positive, winning attitude I believe we can do what is necessary to make sure Cooperative Extension becomes better known and more valued all across America.

Again, thank you so much for bestowing upon me this tremendous honor of the Distinguished Service Ruby Award. Best wishes for a successful conference, an enjoyable Christmas season and a happy and prosperous New Year.

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