

**Extension Guidepoints
Distinguished Ruby Lecture
by
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Let's begin with a few introductory thoughts on what I want to share with you today. Based on the purpose of this lecture and its history, we will consider together, for the next few minutes, where we're going with Cooperative Extension. Or, what will our future look like?

In the 2006 Ruby lecture, Dr. Bonnie McGee used a passage from *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice asked the Cheshire cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way ought I go from here?"

"Where do you want to go?" asked the Cheshire cat.

"I'm not quite sure," responded Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you take," replied the cat.

From there, Bonnie identified broad challenges that are critical to Extension leaders as we focus on our changing America.

I'll use the same look-to-the-future-with-a-purpose approach to share thoughts on several guidepoints as we plan for and move rapidly toward the future. Simply, these guidepoints are those that we in Alabama and in other states have developed, updated, and evolved during the past several years as we projected ahead. They are not hard-and-fast rules but directions of movement and trends projected into the future. I hope they will challenge and stimulate thought and discussions. Some of you will nod rapidly in agreement. Others may be puzzled. Some of you may even disagree with me: That's okay too. But think about each guidepoint in your own context.

These points are based on the belief that each state has, is, or will be engaged in some activity to look toward the future. It may be strategic planning, long-range planning, futuring exercises, organizational revitalization, or whatever process is chosen. Regardless of the methodology, it is imperative, as the Cheshire cat pointed out, that we know where we want to go.

None of the six guidepoints will be revolutionary. All will be familiar in some context: perhaps from previous Ruby lectures, presentations at your professional associations, or administrative updates. What I hope to do is offer some insight on each point that will take you beyond your current level of comfort and security.

Now to the six guidepoints:

I. Relevant Programs With Impacts and Outcomes That Make a Difference

In a recent presentation to our Alabama Cooperative Extension System Urban Unit, Dr. Virginia Caples, 1890 Administrator at Alabama A&M University, talked about the necessity of moving our programs beyond success to significance. She drew these points from the book *The Journey from Success to Significance* by John C. Maxwell:

1. What will be the negative impact to the community, individual, group, or organization if your program does not exist?
2. What is the lasting impact of your program?
3. Does your program meet the needs of diverse audiences?
4. What is the clear relationship of your program or activities to the mission and vision of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System?
5. Does your program have the ability to attract additional resources?
6. What is the value added of your program in economic, social, cultural, education, health, well-being, etc., terms?

Another way to look at our programs is that they must meet local needs with statewide impact now even multistate and national impact. While all needs are local to the individual, family, or community, we must be able to aggregate the results to show impact at the state level and beyond. We address the local aspect by obtaining stakeholders' input "formally and informally" to guide our programs. We have not been as successful in demonstrating impact "yes significance" of all of our activities.

A disconnect sometimes exists between our organizational structures and our customers' needs. We have academic departments and administrative units. Citizens have issues "individuals, families, communities." Our customers (and they are customers) don't care which bureaucratic unit the program comes from; they just expect results. While they are important to us, the unique distinctions and contributions of Extension, research, and teaching don't really matter to our users. Again, get the job done. We must find a way to make our organizational units transparent to our customers. In many ways, we're better at this, but we're not quite where we should be.

Another area of increasing importance is our use of technology in the design and implementation of our programs. This cannot be an afterthought: It must be in the upfront design of our activities and methods. While we acknowledge the needs of those without Internet access, we now know that 70-plus percent of our customers do have that access. Our traditional methods of individual contacts, group activities, print media, and electronic media remain viable, but they must be balanced with "mass-individual"

contacts. Texting, blogs, wikis, Moodle, and various social networking techniques will increase in importance in the future. By the way, how many of you have an eXtension user ID?

These mass-individual methodologies allow us to do a much better job of customer segmentation. We can reach urban, ex-urban, suburban, and rural audiences with programs tailored to their specific needs, when they want them. With today's work and family schedules, it is important that we be ready when our customers are ready. Contrast the learning styles of those of us born before 1946 (traditionalists) to the young and mobile generation of today.

The challenge is to provide significant programs that people can't do without.

II. Motivated Employees

Dr. David Petritz talked about this last year in his lecture on "People Caring About People" when he clearly stated that "the future success of our Extension system is dependent on people who care."

This begins with the potential employees that we recruit, screen, and eventually hire. Are we seeking individuals with the right characteristics? We are beginning to acknowledge the generational differences in work style and approach, but we must go further.

Are we willing to hire nontraditional educators who don't look, think, or act the way we do? Many of us absolutely believe that working 8 to 5 plus whatever it takes is imperative. Recent entrants are more focused on results and outcomes than on the hours they put in. We have to rethink our concept of employment: tenure track and continuing appointments for a 30-year career versus a 3- to 5-year term of employment. Young professionals are quite comfortable with the latter. And this fits some of our funding stream.

An effective performance management system is also imperative. This begins with self-motivated employees who clearly understand what's expected of them. It includes the opportunity to grow and develop professionally, then to advance through the system. Recognition and rewards should include appropriate pay for the type of work expected plus other nonmonetary benefits. What are these benefits for the employees of tomorrow?

Our programs and our people are inextricably linked. The challenge is to successfully connect our employees to our customers with significant programs that people cannot do without.

III. A Viable, Dynamic Funding Stream

Extension programs and people must be supported by a sustained, yet ever-changing revenue stream from multiple sources. Dr. Jay Gogue, Auburn University president, recently talked about his issue for all of higher education, including Cooperative Extension. He points out that our traditional funding sources are erratic or flat at best. In Alabama, we are coming out of three consecutive years of double-digit growth in state appropriations into fiscal year 2009 with a double-digit shortfall. The Texas Agrilife Extension Service recently showed similar trends in their funding.

On the federal level, our capacity (the Smith-Lever formula) funds have been level to slightly decreased, with a modest increase projected. In total, they have not met inflationary growth. The 2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act (the farm bill) significantly enhances our opportunity for growth but with a very different mechanism than we have become accustomed to in the past. Success in the new approach will depend on our Extension educators at all levels becoming engaged in the process.

Local funds from county and municipal governments are under the same pressure. At best, the traditional state, federal, and local funds are and have been critical in maintaining our basic programming structure and in keeping program continuity in place. It is imperative that we maintain this capacity throughout the national Extension system. This existing structure and its continuity are critical factors in attracting nontraditional funding.

Grants and contracts have brought varying success to our programs. It is important that we stay on-mission and not overcommit our existing structure without appropriate capacity-maximizing funding included in the agreements. Gifts and endowments are other somewhat new revenue sources for us in Extension. Many university capital campaigns have been quite successful. Extension has to be a part of these in the future.

Revenue from our programs and educational products has generally been regarded as inappropriate and even distasteful. As a public, tax-supported organization, we are not comfortable going to fees, charges, and sales. Experience has shown that our customers willingly pay for quality programs that meet their needs. Our biggest hurdle here seems to be our own mindset.

Yet another greatly unexplored opportunity is private/public funding partnerships. We're not yet sure how these can or should be structured to meet our public responsibilities without compromising our credibility as unbiased sources of research-based educational opportunities.

These less traditional revenue streams will require a culture change that involves new perspectives on how we do business. Our future depends on making this change happen.

IV. Beyond Diversity to Inclusiveness

This can be characterized in multiple ways. One is to consider that over time we have focused on civil rights, then diversity, and now inclusiveness (or pick your term). Regardless of how it is characterized, the concept is important in our programs, to our audiences, and to our own employees.

The 2008 presidential campaigns have provided a dynamic forum for a national discussion on how we view minorities in our nation. The long-term discussion has now expanded beyond women, African Americans, and Hispanics to include our heritage, country of origin, religion, culture, family structure, lifestyle, blended families, and many other cultural and social identities.

Perhaps it is time for a new descriptive term's maybe the term "inclusiveness," as has been suggested, or some other term yet to emerge. In fact, a legitimate question could be, Do we really have minorities as traditionally defined? As the blending of our society continues, maybe we should be thinking in terms of people and their various needs without labeling them.

In the meantime, as this national discussion plays out, we have important issues to address:

- How do we meet the needs of one minority group of individuals without ignoring or offending the needs of others?
- How do we program to multiple non-English-speaking audiences?
- How do we effectively document our EEO/AA requirements in a blended society?

On this last point, traditional categories of black, white, Hispanic, and other are no longer functional. I recently read a national survey that gave respondents 22 different choices to consider; "other" was still included. What does this really tell us?

It seems likely that 2008 will become known as a time when society moved ahead on this topic and left our bureaucracies behind. It is imperative that we address inclusiveness or whatever concept eventually emerges.

V. Security and Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

Security issues and emergencies vary in size and scale from local to national. Tornadoes affect relatively small geographic areas, often bringing devastation to those affected. Hurricanes, such as Katrina, create widespread regional damage with national implications. The 9/11 attack left local devastation with international repercussions. Regardless of the size, there is always an effect where we work and do our business: locally.

Another factor is the varying time we have to anticipate, plan, and prepare. For 9/11, we had minutes; Katrina, days; drought, weeks and months; climate change, decades. This factor is significant as we address security and emergency preparedness needs.

There are two components to this issue: Internally, how do we operate when our employees have damage and devastation to their homes and communities? How does Extension operate without infrastructure, such as communication, offices, and supplies? An organized emergency contingency plan is necessary. Several states have experience that we can draw from: Louisiana, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and others.

Externally, we need to plan in advance for how Extension can address preparedness, response, and recovery. In preparedness and recovery, we have, over the past few years, developed educational resources that are effective and relevant.

As a general rule, Cooperative Extension is not viewed as a first responder at the height of an incident. It seems that our greatest opportunity to be significant is in the advance identification, recruitment, training, and coordination of volunteers. In a recent presentation, a state emergency management director stated that volunteers readily came forward, but many lacked an understanding of the needs and how to be effective in coordinating with others.

VI. Excellence in Extension

Chester Fehlis addressed this topic in 2004. It bears repeating here because we all know that our individual programs are the **best!!** In fact, we could be described as having the Lake Wobegon syndrome. Garrison Keillor talks about this on his Prairie Home Companion program by describing his community as one "where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average."

It's good that we take pride in our work. Most of us are quite passionate about it. But in reality we trail our teaching and research counterparts, who have an accepted, recognized matrix for measuring success. This is especially important to our university administrators, U.S. senators and representatives, state legislators, and competitive fund managers. The excellence in Extension work that Paul Warner from Kentucky Extension is doing on the national level is leading the way. I suggest that you check it out on the Kentucky Extension Web site.

The real challenge in this area and, in fact, in all of these guidepoints, is to move our programs beyond success to significance. People, especially decision makers, must believe "yes, know" that our programs are necessary for their daily lives and for a prosperous future.

My comments are closing on two overarching points. First, leadership "effective leadership, visionary leadership, committed leadership" is needed to keep Cooperative

Extension on track to continue our tremendous heritage of success. Without this type of leadership, these guidepoints and others that develop in the future are worthless. Leadership is key.

The second point is in the form of a question. Where will this leadership come from? A one-word answer is **YOU**! This includes those in the audience today, others attending this conference, and your coworkers back home.

Leadership occurs at every point in the Extension organization. We often look to the top, but frequently the most effective leadership may be at some point well removed from the top. Central leadership is important but cannot be totally successful when leadership throughout the system is lacking.

I hope that these guidepoints I've shared with you today will provide thoughts to consider and that they will generate others of equal importance. I purposefully covered a lot in this limited time because I wanted to bring them to the front of your mind. After reflection, go to the text of the presentation and ponder each point, especially as it applies to your situation.

Successful leaders will use this occasion and conference to grow.

Successful leaders must continue to learn and develop over time. Hopefully, this occasion and this conference will help you to do just that.

Thanks for your attention.