

**2013 National Distinguished Ruby Award Lecture  
Galaxy IV National Meeting  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
September 18, 2013**

**"Extension's Future"**

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Good morning to all of you, Extension colleagues and friends. It is wonderful to be among such a great group of professionals who have chosen Extension as their passion and pursuit. It is an honor and humbling experience to be selected by my peers to receive the National Distinguished Service Ruby Award from Epsilon Sigma Phi. I am accepting this Award on behalf of the Alpha Rho Chapter of ESP and all Kansas State University Cooperative Extension faculty and staff who dedicate their lives to improving the quality of life and well-being of the people of Kansas every day. Recognition of this magnitude cannot be achieved by an individual alone, and I want to express my appreciation to all my colleagues who have assisted in our joint efforts during my 33-plus-year career in Extension.

I would like to recognize my wife of 33 years, Joyce, who has shared this Extension adventure with me. Most fitting would be to present her with the "Ruby" award for her partnership in this venture, and it has truly been a partnership. Joyce and I have been blessed with three wonderful daughters, all graduates of Kansas State University (five degrees and still counting!). Our two oldest, Joan and Anne, are married. We have one grandson, and another to join us in February. Gina remains in pursuit of her passion for computer science and software development.

My family has sacrificed to help me pursue success as an Extension professional. I have always felt their support in my pursuits. I so much appreciate Joyce, as an Extension professional's spouse, who knew how to make it clear when family HAD to be priority. Thank you, Joyce, for being with me throughout this journey and on forever.

I've had the great fortune of experiencing Extension pretty much my entire life. Growing up on the plains of South Dakota, it's not surprising my parents, Lloyd and Elaine, saw to it that my sister and I were grounded in faith that a greater God would provide guidance and direction, which He has throughout my life! My parents also saw to it that we were active members in our local Belmont Baby Beef 4-H Club.

My dad always talked about a college education. He didn't have a chance, but his children and grandchildren were not going to miss that opportunity. So it was on to South Dakota State for me as a first generation college graduate in my family.

Then, with the encouragement of a caring Extension faculty member, I was convinced to follow him to Oklahoma State University where I received my master's degree. With guidance and encouragement from everyone around me, I continued on for my doctorate at Kansas State University. Throughout that educational path, I was continually influenced and inspired by faculty with Extension responsibilities.

I then had the fortune to become an Extension soil fertility specialist at the University of Missouri. I spent 12 years designing, developing, delivering, and evaluating research and Extension projects and programs in soil testing and nutrient management.

At that time, I was afforded the opportunity to move back to Kansas State University where I've had administrative roles as program leader in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, and currently as associate director for Extension and applied research.

As I'm certain each of you have experienced, I have been so very fortunate over the years to have truly outstanding colleagues, mentors, and friends who provided me with guidance, confidence, trust, encouragement, and an ability to laugh when anything else just didn't seem appropriate. I owe a debt of gratitude to a long list of people who saw something worthy in me and invested their efforts to help me become a better Extension professional. And, I am here to tell you that list of people continues to grow with each year because Extension professionals love to help others. I sincerely thank each and every one of you. Without your support, I can assure you I would not be standing here today. Thank you!

The title I chose for this lecture is "Extension's Future."

Will the Extension System survive? Absolutely.

Will the Extension system be different? Yes, maybe, and I hope not.

What do I mean by "yes, maybe, and I hope not?" Let me explain.

Some of you may be familiar with the book by Simon Sinek, *"Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action."* Sinek provides compelling evidence that when people understand the "why" – the true purpose of what it is they are doing – it instills a personal fulfillment in life. He describes organizations, like Extension, as having three concentric circles that can be used to describe them, with the outside circle being "what."

It is pretty easy to talk about “what we do” in Extension. In my language, it’s all the things that stir up dust. It’s what keeps us busy day to day. And, I will submit to you that Extension, to a fault, loves to talk about what we do. We provide non-biased, research-based information and education, right? Program plans, logic models, target audiences, adult education techniques, partnerships, collaborations, evaluation, seeking outcomes, on and on. Further, what we do has an ever-changing nature to it.

I’m not sure people get too inspired or excited about what we do... if that is all they hear.

The next circle inside the “what” is “how.” How we do our work. Ever been asked about how we do our work? It becomes more difficult to describe with some of the complexities. I’ll come back to some thoughts on “how” a bit later.

Sinek points to the inner most circle that should drive both the “what” and “how” of any organization, and that is **why**.

So, I’ve asked, “Why Cooperative Extension?” I believe Extension professionals understand the “why of Extension.” But, to put it into hopefully a more appropriate framework, I want to take us back in history – back to why we were afforded a Smith Lever Act in 1914.

Who is the Father of Extension? Seaman Knapp.

Why did he become known as the Father of Extension?

And, why do we have Cooperative Extension, anyway?

If you are interested, and I hope you are, in learning a great deal about Seaman Knapp, I encourage you to study him. Dr. Waded Cruzado, President at Montana State University, at the 2012 APLU “Seaman Knapp Lecture” did a wonderful job of reviewing his life.

“Seaman A. Knapp was born in northern New York on 1833. Through some difficulty, he was able to continue with his college education. Seaman’s father wasn’t too keen on college. It was too expensive.” Tuition was a year’s worth of family income as a cabinet maker. But, history tells us it was Seaman’s mother who saw the passion for learning and provided the encouragement for him to pursue that education.

Seaman Knapp graduated from Union College. Then, while working in Vermont, he suffered an accident that destroyed his knee, almost crippling him for life. Married now, this young couple moved to Iowa and invested all their savings in acquiring the finest herd of Merino sheep that money could buy . . . only to have the entire flock die in the first winter storm.

But better days were ahead for Seaman Knapp. He was appointed to head the department of agriculture at Iowa State Agricultural College, and he later served one year as the second

president of the institution. Then it was off to Louisiana to farm a tract of land and show others how to develop productivity in that region through different farming practices.

He seemed a somewhat impatient man. He was looking to the relatively new U.S. Department of Agriculture for providing research to advance farming practices and felt it wasn't happening fast enough. Did you know, he was a driving force and advocate for passage of the Hatch Act creating the Agricultural Experiment Station Network? "Father of Extension," or "Father of the Agricultural Experiment Station?"

After passage of the Hatch Act in 1887, agricultural experiment stations were established at land-grant universities across the country. This system of teaching and research was designed to strengthen each other.

Seaman Knapp was a close friend of the Secretary of Agriculture and found himself on various assignments. That is when the South was suffering the cotton crop failures due to a boll weevil infestation. Seaman Knapp was again called upon to go into that region and solve the problem.

You see, the research had been done. USDA had already found solutions to control the pest, the boll weevil. They had the answers. Reports and pamphlets showing the results had been disseminated throughout the farming community, **but growers were skeptical.**

And, it was here that Seaman Knapp provided the evidence for Everett Rogers when Rogers wrote a chapter on "the change agent" in his book *Diffusion of Innovations*. While the solution to the problem had been identified, changing farming practices was going to take more than the science.

It's also Knapp's approach that spells out many of the key elements found in T. J. Talbert's "The Extension Workers Code" (Kansas Extension Bulletin #33, dated February 1922).

Knapp's plan for change required that he be a trusted source (no easy task) and that established a program development advisory committee that would raise funds to cover potential losses and help identify someone who was willing to have the demonstration on his or her land. Seaman Knapp in a matter of roughly 3 crop seasons had executed a program plan that resulted in farmers, **convincing themselves**, of the new practices and approaches that brought greater stability and profitability in their farming systems.

The extension agent was born.

Knapp is quoted as saying "The farmer must solve this problem on his own farm and with his own hands... What a man hears, he may doubt, what he sees he may also doubt, but what he does he cannot doubt"

I could go on and on about Seaman Knapp. I'd encourage you to study his history. He was an amazing man with a vision for "why."

Again, I quote Seaman Knapp, saying that his purpose was... "to create a better people.... High-minded, stalwart, courageous, and brave. You are beginning at the bottom to influence the masses of mankind, and ultimately those masses always control the destiny of a country. If you allow their practices to sink **lower and lower**, the country must ultimately drop to a lower level in moral, political, and religious tone, and we go down to degradation and infamy as a nation; But, if we begin at the bottom and plant human action upon the rock of high principles, with right cultivation of the soil, right living for the common people, and comforts everywhere ... the people will lend their support and all civilization will arise higher and higher, and we shall become a beacon light to all the nations of the world."

That is the "why" that was driving Seaman Knapp.

Do you believe that is the "why" of the USDA researchers? The researchers came up with the solution to the boll weevil. Seaman Knapp saw his purpose "to create a better people." That was Seaman Knapp's "why!"

Should the "why" of Extension change?

What is the "why" in today's Cooperative Extension?

What is our purpose?

I believe it is still best expressed in the words of the "Extension Professionals' Creed." To paraphrase, we believe all people should have the opportunity to improve their lives and their livelihoods. We further believe educational experiences and opportunities are the best way in which to truly change for the better. And to that end, Extension brings science, discovery, knowledge, practice, and understanding to create solutions to big issues.

And the best part .... those solutions are their own solutions!

And, I am here to suggest that this "why" is and should remain a constant. In my answer to the question, "will Extension be different?" When it comes to the why, my answer is "I hope not."

Isn't it interesting when you think of "why."

It isn't about agriculture, natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, or community development. Rather, it's about changing people, communities, society in such ways as to lift them up to a better place, and to do it in such a way that it becomes THEIR own solutions!

Okay, now let's talk about how. If we are going to create better people, and improve their lives and their livelihoods, "how" are we going to do that?

I'd challenge you to begin by thinking big in your community, county, or state. What is it that is holding back prosperity, quality of life, and pursuits that would lift up your community. And think of community in its broadest definition?

"How" are we going to respond to our purpose, ...to our why?

I'd submit to you that this might be the most important aspect with respect to the future of Extension. "How" might be in defining the grand challenges facing your community, county, state, region, nation. "How" might also reflect the way in which clientele, stakeholders, partners, and the public experience Extension.

In Kansas, we have defined "how" as doing everything possible towards being relevant, reliable and responsive towards five grand challenges facing Kansans. Those grand challenges for Kansas include **water; health; feeding the world; community vitality; and, growing tomorrow's leaders**. For interest of time, I'll skip describing the situations around each of those challenges that caused them to come to the surface for Extension in Kansas.

They are simple, broad, and were created by and with our stakeholders, in their terms. When asked why Extension should exist in Kansas, our stakeholders answer was to help Kansans in making progress on these five challenges.

Just a few years back, Extension's Committee on Organization and Policy, which serves a national governing board, commissioned a marketing and communications initiative, and a task force was created. From that work, I find some interesting ways to think about "how" we do our work.

Extension's success is dependent on our value proposition, the value that users describe about us. Not how we think we look, but how users see us. They say, Extension is a resource you can **trust**. You can be confident that **experts** have reviewed and developed programs to ensure that you get the **best information** for your needs. Through Extension, you have access to programs developed by a **network of universities** throughout the country. Extension employees and volunteers work hard at **improving the quality of life** for their communities. Extension is a **trusted** friend whom clients can turn to for support when they need **reliable knowledge and information**.

Extension is **friendly, caring, trusted, committed, approachable, down-to-earth, practical, informed, and knowledgeable**. Extension is **relaxed and friendly** but also **knowledgeable and informative**. And, Extension uses **everyday language** that everyone will understand.

That's what those who know us have said about us! I hope it causes you to well up with pride. At the same time, I hope you understand it's not about entitlements for past greatness. It's about living up to the standards of how we accomplish our work.

Will Extension change when it comes to "how"? Maybe.

I suspect some of you thought the "how" would be "demonstrations, meetings, social media, radio, workshops, newsletters, short courses, facilitations, collaborations, grants, contracts, fee-based programs, and so on. But, I would submit to you, that is really "what we do." That's our programs, and they can and do change all the time.

Will Extension be different in the future? Our purpose, our "why," remains constant. Our "how" may be changing some. And, if measured upon "what we do" the simple answer is, yes.

So, how should we tell people about Extension? I think my usual way sounds something like this.....

Extension is an organization tied to Kansas State University with local Extension professionals and staff who work with regional and state staff in designing and delivering educational programs relating to agriculture, families, communities, and youth. We work with a local advisory committee to define priorities and then organize meetings, etc. Oh, and you've probably heard of 4-H? And, the county fair? Yep, Extension is about 4-H and the fair and much more. What else do you want to know?

Inspiring? Or confusing?

Let's try rearranging the information according to Simon Sinek's suggestion to first describe the why, then the how, and finally the what.

Extension provides practical education you can trust – to help people, businesses, and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future. Our focus in Kansas is on solving grand challenges in our state around water, health, feeding the world, vitalizing our communities, and growing tomorrow's leaders. We are Kansas State University in your local community. We have numerous opportunities for you to get involved in making serious progress on each of these grand challenges. Will you join us?

Positioning Extension for success is about connecting purpose (the why) with approach (the how) as we set out to do what we do. It is about lifting up communities through innovation and creativity to make for a better life for all. It's about inclusion. It's about being pertinent, germane, and material to solving the grand challenges. It is about providing value beyond expectation.

It's about trust and integrity. It's about going beyond being an informational resource, to one who seeks to identify the underlying causes of problematic issues and helps clients to find appropriate resources and methods to address those issues. It is about being a leader in your community by continuously seeking to improve your leadership knowledge and skills.

It's about being educators, who continually strive to improve your knowledge of education theory and your ability to develop, implement, assess and improve effective education programs. It's about being problem solvers and knowing modern problems are increasingly complex. It's about continually working to develop subject matter expertise within an Extension programming area that is in high demand among your constituents.

It's about recognizing that specialization enables the Extension professional to progress beyond being an "unbiased" resource for information... to being an "unbiased" **expert** in a highly needed field or endeavor.

And, it's about the Extension professional being a great **networker** and **communicator** with your Extension colleagues – especially those who specialize in other subject matter disciplines. When you are faced with an issue needing expertise beyond the scope of your expertise, having this collegial network will enable you as an Extension professional to align the best assistance by referring a client to a colleague who has the required subject matter specialization.

Cooperative Extension has every kind of challenge out in front. I am not denying any of that. I simply believe if we will hold up our purpose, "our why," with pride and confidence, as we explain how we are working to solve their grand challenges, that opportunities will appear before us.

As we embark upon the celebration of 100 years since the signing of the Smith Lever Act – 100 years since the creation of Cooperative Extension – let's take this opportunity to creatively express our purpose, **our "why."** I challenge each of you to be able to communicate Extension's why.

I close with a passage from "Start With Why" by Simon Sinek.

"Organizations who forget WHY they were founded, ... show up to the race every day to outdo someone else... instead of... to outdo themselves. The pursuit,...for those who lose sight of WHY..., is for the medal, or to beat someone else.... If we all take some responsibility to start with WHY, and inspire others to do the same, then, together, we can change the world. And, that's pretty inspiring!!"

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.



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