

BUILD-A-SALESPERSON COMING SOON TO A MALL NEAR YOU

by Megan Sheridan and Maud Roucan-Kane

My niece loves the **Build-A-Bear Workshop** in our mall. Instead of picking any old stuffed animal off the shelf at **Toys “R” Us**, she can handpick the look and feel of her furry friend, decide whether it’s a boy or girl and even determine its occupation by dressing it up in a doctor’s outfit. And, best yet, it doesn’t have to be a bear. She can build a longhorn steer or a lovable lobster, if her heart so desires.

It would be interesting to see what characteristics producers would select if there was a Build-A-Salesperson Workshop. Physical appearance wouldn’t be an option at the workshop, but producers could determine what personality traits their salesperson would have and what their sales approach would be.

Since a workshop of that caliber is unlikely, Purdue researchers decided to ask producers what characteristics and services they look for in an agricultural salesperson. More than 2,500 producers from across the country responded to the questions, which were part of the Center for Food and Agricultural Business’ *Large Commercial Producer Survey*. The producers represented seven enterprises: cotton, dairy, swine, and beef, as well as corn and soybean; wheat, barley and canola; and fruit, nut, vegetable, and vine (FNV).

BE HONEST

Producers, regardless of their operation size, ranked honesty as the most important attribute of a salesperson (see Figure 1). Producers relate honesty with good follow-up service, offering the best price, providing access to supplier resources and acting as a consultant to their operations. One producer described how his salesperson “helped as if the farm was his own” and even suggested actions that “weren’t in his interest.”

OFFER VALUABLE INFORMATION

In general, producers are relying more on salespeople for information and advice than they were five years ago. Offering relevant and timely information to producers ranked second, after good follow-up, when producers considered eight characteristics of their best agricultural salesperson (see Figure 2). Producers would rather have a salesperson who brings relevant information over one that calls frequently.

RESPECT THEIR TIME

“I can’t listen to everyone because I’d never get any work done,” one producer explains. “A salesperson who respects my time has a better chance than someone who’s pushy.”

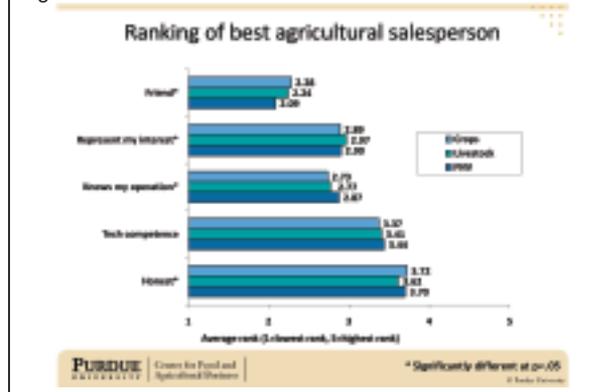
It’s important for salespeople to consider the other demands producers face every day. When a salesperson shows up unannounced, the farmer may not have time to visit. Scheduling farm visits, in addition to showing up and leaving on time, shows producers the respect they’re looking for.

The concepts seem simple, but

Fig. 1



Fig. 2



salespeople have the challenge of delivering on them at the level producers expect. Each producer has preferences, and all of them won’t pick the same options at a Build-A-Salesperson Workshop. By exemplifying the personality characteristics that producers are seeking, along with getting to know their operation and how decisions are made, salespeople can bring value to farmers and extend the length of time that they keep a farmer’s business.

For more information on the *Large Commercial Producer Survey*, visit www.agecon.purdue.edu/cab/programs/lcp. **AM**

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