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"Faith is not trying to believe something regardless of the evidence; faith is daring to do something regardless of consequences." -Sherwood Eddy

## KOW Ruminations

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### The Power of *negative* thinking

It takes *more* than just a positive attitude –good results *require* right thinking *and doing*.

Ever get to feeling that you live amongst the insane? Seriously . . . Yep, it *could* be interpreted as arrogant, but I sure do, at times, feel this way. Recently I read the following quote included for the **dairyman's** edification in another newsletter:

"In this world the optimists have it, *not* because they are *always* right, but because they are *always* positive. **Even when wrong**, they are positive, and *that is the way of achievement*, correction, improvement, and success. Educated, eyes-open, optimism pays; pessimism can only offer the empty consolation of *being right*." David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*. Emphasis added.

While the above quote may *seem* to be wisdom at first analysis, take just a moment to reconsider (especially the parts I've put in italics). Can you really believe / think / do "*wrong*" things and *truly* achieve success? Only *if* those *wrongs* are learned to never be repeated. Yet this quote seems to infer right or wrong is irrelevant! Crazy!

Gee, maybe I should try this out next time I'm presented with a problem to troubleshoot, "Well Farmer Jones, you see, it's not about whether or not you are feeding the dry cows properly– the real issue we have is how you *feel*

about what you are doing. Regardless of the reoccurring problems with fresh cow ketosis and milk fever, I can see that you have a *positive mental attitude about your decisions* and that's what matters most." Before you laugh, consider just how deeply ingrained this fuzzy thinking has become in our dairy industry. Every time I pick up a *Dairy Herd Management* magazine, or one of our state ag newspapers, there's some positive thinking "guru" encouraging dairymen to continue (blindly, but blissfully) moving down the same pathway to destruction that many of them are on (Why can't they keep their barns full without *purchasing* so many cows?). The message is "don't worry, be happy –*choose* to have a positive attitude and things will come out okay in the end." One recent "guru" I've read even went so far as to state that "A positive attitude is **the most important component** of a successful operation . . . It is not who you (actually) are, but rather who you *think* you are that sets the boundaries for your accomplishments . . . If you *think* positively, it will yield positive results. If you *think* negatively, it will yield negative results." Emphasis added. This "guru" just happens to be a *senior vice president for Farm Credit Services* and I'm too embarrassed for him to provide his name. He went on to cite Norman Vincent Peale, author of *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Gee whiz, with this kind of thinking, I suppose stuff like cash flow, debt per cow, and equity doesn't mean

much any more . Don't bet on it! If an Angus just *thought* she was a Holstein . Oh, and it's not just the bankers involved, I also read of a recent gathering of 1200 dairy farmers that were coached into standing up to declare in unison "I believe (in the future of the dairy industry)." The reporter (again, I'll leave unnamed to protect) stated that "those simple words **-I believe-**swept and **energized** the room." Then Henry Ford was quoted "Whether you think you can or think you can't -you are right."

What is my point in all the above? Hogwash.

No, I'm not suggesting that a "bad or negative" *attitude is helpful* or that trying to be optimistic is all bad in-and-of itself. I would agree that if you *think* you can't *you surely won't*. What I am suggesting, though, is that all *true success* is built upon *truth* and that one method to discern *truth* (from falsehood or error) is its correspondence with reality . **Yet, there is actually value in being just a little bit negative -if that "negativity" is a healthy dose of skepticism.**

Even bold lies, if often repeated, loose their shock value and often metamorphosize into the dimwit's "facts". My favorite little pithy quote for the dairyman can be found in Harry Weier's barn (Deerfield, Wisc.). It goes something like, "It's not the top 6" of the soil that determines the profitability of the farm, but rather the top 6" of the dairyman" -and I don't think this was merely a reference to *attitude* !

Think about all the lies told farmers over the years in order to get them to part with more of their hard earned dollars. I too wish I could have a few of my own dollars back -from the many mistakes I've made, believing in things that simply were *not true*.

There are no shortcuts or "free lunches" on the road to a successful / profitable dairy farm enterprise. Far too much of the "new and improved" is merely the old repackaged for the inexperienced and naive -no matter how sophisticated, cross-referenced, *testimonialized*. Stick with the *fundamentals* you find in KOW literature as you manage and feed your soils, crops, and cows. KOW publications / literature are not, *and will not* become a forum for the marketing of mental anesthetics. Soils, crops, and cows won't be convinced by positive thinking alone, but will readily demonstrate ultimate reality. If I seem to be a little "negative" at times, it's skepticism looking out for you.

I'll end with my own small attempt at inspiration by sharing the following story by Ron Mehl called "Making Adjustments".

\* \* \* \* \*

An old sea captain named Eleazar Hall lived in Bedford, Massachusetts, during the time of the great sailing ships. He was renowned, legendary, and revered as the most successful of all sea captains of the day. He worked harder, stayed out longer, and lost fewer men while catching more fish than anyone else.

Captain Hall was often asked about his uncanny ability to stay out so long without navigational equipment. He'd once been gone for two years without coming home for a point of reference.

Problems are an opportunity . .for you to learn or for the salesman to *capitalize* on. Which do you choose?  
- T. W.

Eleazar simply replied, "Oh, I just go up on the deck and listen to the wind and rigging. I get the drift of the sea, look up at the stars, and then set my course."

Well, times changed in Bedford. The big insurance companies moved in and said they could no longer insure the ships if the captains didn't have a certified and properly trained navigator on board. They were terrified to tell Eleazar. But to their amazement he said, "If I must, I will go and take the navigational courses."

Stockdale had lived for nearly eight years "without any prisoner's rights, no set release date and no certainty as to whether he would ever again see his family." Author Jim Collins asked him "Who didn't make it out?" Stockdale replied, "The optimists." Puzzled, Collins said he didn't understand. Stockdale continued, "Oh, they were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas.' And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart." He paused momentarily, then asserted: "This is a very important lesson. **You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end -which you can never afford to lose -with the need for discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.**"

Regarding former P.O.W. Admiral James Stockdale who survived the "Hanoi-Hilton." The New American, 1-28-02

Eleazar graduated high in his class, and having greatly missed the sea, he immediately took off for a long voyage. On the day of his return, the whole town turned out to ask him the question:

"Eleazar, how was it having to navigate with all those charts and equations?"

Eleazar sat back and let out a long, low whistle. "Oh," he replied, "it was simple. Whenever I wanted to know my location, I'd go to my cabin, get out my charts and tables, work the equations and set my course with scientific precision. Then I'd go upon the deck and listen to the wind and rigging, get the drift of the sea, look at the stars, **and go back and correct the errors that I had made in computation.**"

Ya know, sometimes it's better to *develop* and trust your own expertise over the latest trends.