Blum’s Bit: Enjoying the by-product of focusing on people
By Amy Blum

Burning the candle at both ends works for a while, but eventually, everything meets in the middle and you get burned.

We all do it at some point … we overcommit. We work round the clock to make sure cattle are checked, crops are planted and deadlines of all kinds are met. Having your nose to the grindstone in the short-term certainly doesn’t hurt anything, especially when you can see long-term benefits.

But, when you’ve had your head down working and you look up to discover a decade has gone by in the blink of an eye, it might be time to do a little re-evaluating!

As a Type A personality who thrives under pressure, I like to think I’m not alone in my overcommitted tendencies. I’ve spent a decade learning and growing in order to build a career to benefit both my family and my personal needs. From 70-hour weeks in the office to a town-working ranch mom of four little ones, my life has changed vastly, and I’m a very blessed woman.

Yet, I recently found myself looking up to discover a decade has passed by in a blink, and while I’ve made much advancement on many fronts, it dawned on me I may have lost sight of a goal.

I’ve lost balance by burning both ends of the candle for too long. New, shiny opportunities have caused me some adult ADHD with a little OCD for flavor.

Rather than get lost in my over analytical mind and come undone, I find myself wondering if the cattle industry isn’t in the same predicament to some degree?

It’s an exciting time in the cattle business. Markets rock. Technology has revolutionized the way we can do business. Genetic advancements have given us some of the best, most efficient cattle in history.

We’re still in an extremely challenging business. But, for the most part, life is pretty good in many operations.

However, I can’t help but wonder if we’ve fragmented ourselves too much. In the quest to get bigger, better and so on, have we lost sight of a common goal and become an industry focused too heavily on operations and production?

Don’t get me wrong. The core of agriculture is production; however, the world in which production matters has been transformed. Somewhere along the way, too many have lost sight of our underlying core … living, breathing people who make decisions based on emotion. Today, we call this group “consumers,” and we rack our brains about how we can tell them our story, how we can help them understand our needs.

But, guess what? They don’t care about our needs as producers. They care about themselves and their families; once each of us strips away the bravado, our own families provide us motivation, too. That’s why people communicating with people about emotional needs has to be part of our industry’s business plan.

As farmers and ranchers, we know our businesses must be built on traditions with long-term viability in mind. We see the value of technology. We have rational understanding of our technical, production oriented businesses. We know how to put our heads down and get the work done in order to feed an ever-growing world.

But, when we pick up our heads up, have we found ourselves behind the eight-ball? In our quest to take care of business—which must be done—have we sacrificed our ability to communicate with the society we’re trying to feed?

Think about it … while farmers and ranchers are crunching numbers and being environmental stewards—you know, doing the work—politicians, activist groups and other factions are busy using us as pawns in one game after another where the main goal in each is to make money.

Making money in the livestock business is certainly a rewarding, desirable result. However, what separates us from other factions takes us back to the core of our existence … Agriculture is about people providing other people the basic necessities for life. Profits are merely a by-product of serving people well, and serving people well requires an emotional connection.

Do we still have an emotional connection with our consumers? On some fronts, I believe we’re absolutely connected, and when many of us look at our personal operations, I’m sure we can confidently say the people in our lives are a big part of what fuels our passion. By and large, however, there are gaps.

I commend the small groups and individuals making an effort to give agriculture a face again. Telling producer stories is key to getting back to the emotion of what we do. Telling stories in a way that speaks to consumers in their own wheelhouse is another story. Building strong relationships is a big part of how we’ll protect agricultural.

Are we doing all we can? What are we doing on a larger scale though? Are there strides being taken to ensure producers and consumers are being heard in order to create a solid plan for success?

Maybe clear answers to these questions already exist; I hope they do. But I haven’t been able to find them, and when I investigate, I often find more cause for concern.

Are we an industry able to bring transformation through a balance of strong relationships, common sense and business know-how? Or, have we lost sight of the people and emotion at the core of our existence?

As we move into the season of renewal and rebirth, I hope we can all take some time to step back from the rigorous work at hand and look ahead. In close, I’m leaving you with one of my favorite Gaelic blessings:

May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face;
the rains fall soft upon your fields, and until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of His hand.