

Taking Stock: Bottlenecks and Blind Spots

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A number of years ago Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman starred in a movie entitled *The Bucket List*. They were both suffering from cancer, and each made a list of the things they wanted to cross off their life list while they still had time. Many of my producers have similar goal lists on their dairies. Some hope to expand to a certain number of cows, others aim to earn a Master Breeders shield. All are on a journey, but with different destinations in mind. Despite that, all want to be successful. As different as those bucket list goals may be, there are many factors that contribute to the overall success across all of our farms.

On New Years, many of you may have made personal resolutions for change. I want to challenge you to also take stock of where you are on the road to success for your farm. For example, our industry has made huge strides in reproductive success over the last decade. Getting cows in calf in a timely manner results in better days in milk the next year, which results in more efficient milk production and greater cash-flow. But not all producers are at the same page in this journey. Those with a 30% pregnancy rate have likely embraced many different tools from many different sources. For others, this is a work in progress. How would you rate yourself? As a veterinarian, I am trained to find the bottlenecks in others' journeys, but I am sometimes blind to potholes in my own. This is where having a team that you can trust becomes important. Veterinarians. Nutritionists. Bankers. Accountants. Neighbours and Friends. Building a complete team is important, as each member will contribute advice on the parts of the map that they are best trained in. These may be bottlenecks that you are aware of, but they may be blind spots that you have missed or thought of as small. Each will also be able to help you assess the investment and returns associated with change.

As you examine your team, choosing those you can build trust with is key. They may be brilliant, but if you do not believe they have your best interest in mind, any input can be dismissed with doubt.

Finally, are you open minded? Are you willing to listen if a friend suggests your bunk face could use work? Its only worth asking for input if you are ready to take stock.

This exercise may seem silly to some, but industry wide initiatives such as ProAction will soon lead the discussion on some of these points. Why not begin these discussions now with your trusted team? To quote the famous philosopher Red Green, "Remember, we're all in this together".

Charts

Over the last two decades, most advisors have concentrated our efforts on the blocks in yellow (see Chart #1). Success in each block helped to build the next level as well. Cow welfare and comfort has always been central, but we are now realizing the importance of also focusing more time on the other "non traditional" blocks in red as well.

Chart #2 - For this exercise, grade yourself 1-10 on each block, then ask your team/trusted advisors to do the same. Next, based on the lowest ranking block from each, ask them for input on one thing you can attempt this year to impact the score.

Chart #1

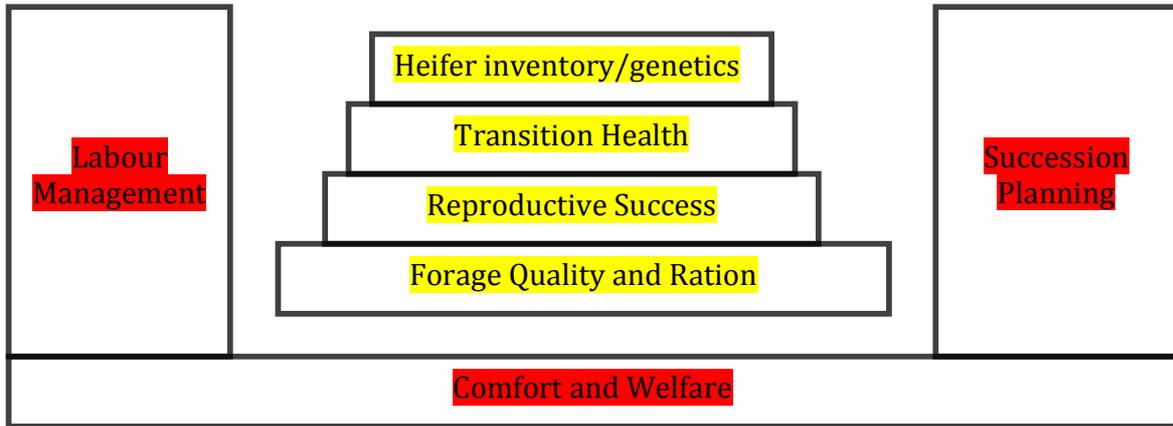


Chart #2

2015 Bottle Neck Score Chart

Score 1-10 or N/A if unfamiliar with that part of the dairy

	Forage	Repro	Transition	Heifers	Comfort	Labour	Succession
Self score							
Veterinarian							
Nutritionist							
Hoof trimmer							
Accountant							
Bank							
Friend							