

Using All the Brains in the Room **By Brian Reed DVM, MBA**

Returning from Milwaukee, Wisconsin after attending this year's annual conference of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP), my thoughts are related to a quote attributed to President Woodrow Wilson. President Wilson had to deal with many decisions regarding World War I during his presidency and was quoted as saying. "I not only use all the brains that I have, but all I can borrow." We were not solving world peace in Milwaukee, but the incredible brain power of over 1,100 veterinarians and over 300 veterinary school students trying to learn all they can to improve cattle health, productivity and well-being is still impressive.

Veterinarians can pick and choose from the many topics presented that are appropriate to their situations and clients. In addition to all of this technical knowledge to absorb, I also learn a great deal and figure out how to apply the information I am learning by having the "hallway" and "mealtime" conversations with colleagues and friends, both new and old. It is truly unique listening to some of the conversations and "colorful" descriptions of experiences that rural veterinarians have in the course of their practices. We somehow manage to have these very descriptive (some would say disgusting) conversations without batting an eye and continuing with our meals!

So why am I telling you these things? I actually have a couple of reasons that relate to the animal care, dairy farm management and decision-making on your farm. First of all, I urge you to "use all the brains you can borrow" on your farm to help improve your success. I have been discussing the education and training that your veterinarian can obtain over the course of their career. The same thing can be said for the other advisors you rely on to help you make decisions on your farm. These advisors may be involved in the areas of nutrition, forage management, finance and taxes, genetics, milk quality and many other areas important to you. Make sure you are getting everything you can out of all of them! As advisors, we can't always read your mind about the things you are dealing with and trying to make decisions about. Ask us specific questions about things you would like input on. Also, challenge us from time to time by asking us what we see as potential ways to improve your farm situation.

The other way you can "use all the brains you can borrow" is to get your key advisors in the room at the same time, all working to help you. This can be done by setting up a profit team or management team of some type on your farm. These can be useful for specific issues you are going through at any given time. They can also be set up on an ongoing basis to help you always strive toward the next steps to improve your farm. The Center for Dairy Excellence offers resources to help you do this if you need some help.

The second reason I was explaining to you how AABP conferences help veterinarians to be lifelong learners is to encourage you to develop your off-farm learning experiences to

continuously improve your farm business. There can be real advantages to getting out of your day-to-day routine and gaining education to improve yourself and your team. Events such as the PA Dairy Summit, Animal Care Workshops, PDMP events, Keystone Farm Show, Ag Progress Days and various industry group meetings and tours can all fill this role for you. Just as I mentioned AABP, there are various ways to learn at these events. You learn from formal lectures, but you also learn by talking to other farmers in the hallways and during lunches. At open houses and farm tours, you may see something completely unrelated to the purpose of the meeting that strikes a chord for you to implement on your farm to solve a different problem. You just have to show up with your eyes, ears and mind open to new things.

No one person ever has all the answers. If someone thinks they know it all already and can't learn anything new, they are probably right that they can't learn anything new! But, if they have an attitude like President Wilson's quote reflects, they can move forward with better solutions, more productivity, and ultimately better success in whatever they endeavor to do. Make sure you are using all of your resources to help you improve the success of your farm.