

BLACK INK

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Put it to the test

By Nicole Lane Erceg

“Nicole, I think you have cancer,” the doctor told me.

That stopped me in my tracks, as it would anyone. Unbelievable. I’m young, a picture of health — there’s no way this was happening to me.

But there I was, 25 years old, sitting in a doctor’s office, hearing the data points that suggested otherwise.

We would have to dig deeper, run more tests.

There’s nothing like a crisis to shift perspective. Suddenly, everything that’s actually important snaps into vivid focus. Changes that didn’t seem necessary become crystal clear, urgent.

In agriculture it’s often the same. It takes a calving season wreck to realize a selection mistake, a “drought of the century” to remember how vital are your abundant water sources, a market crash to shed light on the type of cattle that pay the bills in both good times and bad. It takes a disaster to reprioritize the things we always knew were significant, but thought could wait until tomorrow.

Live and learn, right? Unless you don’t survive the lesson, not to be morbid.

In life and business, we can get caught up in the day-to-day whirlwind and miss time for analysis and planning for dramatically better outcomes with less risk. We always intend to, but there just never seems to be enough time.

These decisions are often hard, requiring time for research, investment in knowing and sometimes adjusting the status quo. Change isn’t easy until it’s necessary. But it’s a whole lot better to evaluate and make some hard adjustments now, before adversity is staring you in the face.

The trick is knowing what you’re up against.

You’ve got to run the tests, analyze the results, then make the changes.

The process might uncover a disaster waiting to happen. It could also reveal an opportunity for improved profits, for a better life.

Recently I sat across a rancher’s dinner table looking through carcass data. As we flipped through the pages we talked about what certain things meant, whether this number or that was good or bad.

It was good; really good: 37% Prime good.

There are few things that give us honest feedback like data from well-proven science. It doesn’t think, doesn’t lie, only tells what is, what could be and what isn’t. It can expose weakness and point us in the right direction, if only we take time to test, reflect and then do the hard part—act.

Like the rancher, I got lucky and my final tests came back cancer-free. Tests that I originally thought were a total waste of time and money. Instead, I gained a different perspective, priorities and course of action going forward.

Is there a part of your business that’s overdue for a checkup? Maybe it’s time to put it to the test.

Next time in *Black Ink*® Miranda Reiman will discuss decades in the making. Questions? E-mail nerceg@certifiedangusbeef.com.

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