

Adding IAE to your day

Andy Overbay for *Progressive Forage*

AT A GLANCE

Don't just duck your head, bow your neck and plow forward or you'll never recognize opportunities as they appear, which is a more intelligent application of effort.

Ugh! Another article telling me (the manager) about all the things I am doing wrong. Well, not exactly – because as a professional dairy farmer when I was a younger man, I appreciate the fact that farm owners and operators work very hard to provide food and fiber. My contribution to the chorus of “how to be a more effective manager” is more along the lines of, “You know, sometimes we need to stop and think about what we are doing and why we are doing it.” In other words, sometimes we work too hard.

I have written several times in my columns about my dad and what a great influence he was on me. Like many of you and your fathers, he was a hard worker. You only had to shake his hand to get a grip (literally) on how his days were spent. That said, he also instilled in me a “work smarter” mentality that has helped me immensely over my 53-plus years.

The definition of working smarter can be a bit elusive. Some might think the term is a bit elitist; you need to be highly educated to farm today. Nope, not at all. Some of the wisest people I know do not have a formal education, but I must add that one thing my dad insisted on was my brother and me excelling at school. He felt that way because he knew it gave us more opportunities to be successful and because he knew that doing one's best at something was a habit, so he expected us to give 110 percent to our studies too.

All of this background has shaped some of my approach to the workday, an approach I term “IAE” – intelligent application of effort. IAE forces you to budget time during the work week to evaluate the priorities of the work

ahead, come to a rational decision on the best path to accomplish your goals and move forward.

Again, my dad ingrained in me much of this wisdom. One thing Dad did was focus like a laser on a task at hand. He never started a project without seeing it to the end before taking up another issue. That is a sound approach – but only if you have carefully evaluated which chore is most important to the success of the farm at the time.

An example from our farm comes from over 20 years ago when we operated a dairy, beef and burley tobacco operation. A yearly issue was that the tobacco crop and corn silage needed to be harvested within roughly the same time frame. If you've never harvested burley tobacco, count your blessings. It is hard work and a job that, without the use of much hired labor, can consume a lot of time. Depending on weather conditions, tobacco harvest can carry a terrible opportunity cost in regard to a corn silage crop that is getting too mature.

It wasn't an easy sell given his gung-ho attitude, but I had to sell Dad on the fact that while the tobacco crop was a lucrative enterprise, assuring the highest quality of our forages feeding our dairy herd and replacements had a much higher influence on the financial success of the overall farming operation. In our case, it was a 20-to-1 influence.

To his credit, he listened, reflected and changed course – something that was not in his nature to do at all. But it is also why my wife and I were able to increase the size and production of the herd by 50 percent.

IAE also may have a nice effect on the urgency and speed you have

to accomplish tasks. Another one of Dad's nuggets of wisdom was that sometimes you need to slow down to move faster. He taught me that it is important to budget time into each day for the unforeseen. This allowed us to suffer the breakdown, power outage or unfavorable weather with two important tools: time to deal with the issue and a plan of action to move forward regardless. Going “90 miles an hour with your hair on fire” might work for a while when there is an “all-hands-on-deck” task at hand, but using that approach all the time simply means you are one critical breakdown away from being sidelined for an extended (and possibly financially crippling) time.

It's also important to budget maintenance and repairs into your day. One thing I found to be true was that as we added time-saving automation to our dairy operation, there was a trade-off in that I had to spend much more time going around with the grease gun, while I can't remember that I ever spent a second greasing a silage pitchfork.

I took the time to grease conveyors, augers and mixer wagons because even the best equipment (like people) has bad days. Quoting University of California – Los Angeles basketball coach John Wooden and Dr. Dave Kohl of Virginia Tech, “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” Not budgeting time into the day to maintain what we had purchased only means that it would eventually need to be removed, repaired or replaced that much sooner, costing us much more time than using the grease gun required.

So what is the secret to guaranteeing IAE in your operation? I think a reasonable first step is to know the details of your operation. An enterprise analysis is a great place to start. Break your operation down into categories that make sense for you. Crops, livestock, custom work or other categories all need to be assessed as to what they bring in and what their true



Andy Overbay is an extension agent with Virginia Cooperative Extension. He can be reached at aoverbay@vt.edu

costs are, both real and opportunity costs. Knowing exactly what is making you the most or costing you the most is paramount to shaping how you go about your day, week, month and year.

Realistic scheduling is also important. How long will it really take you to accomplish your tasks? I had a neighbor who bought a home-building kit that was advertised to take 24 hours to assemble. His reflection was that, “The 24 was right, but it was closer to 24 weeks.” To his credit, he got it done.

You may be getting tired of hearing this, but as Dad used to say, “If you can't keep up, you'll never catch up.” He mostly applied this logic to paying bills and meeting other financial obligations, but the same holds true on the subject of time. I have shared with many students over the years about the “rule of 32.” The rule of 32 is simply the sum one gets when you add up that there are only 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week, and there is only one of you – $24 + 7 + 1 = 32$. You can push and pull and kick and scream with all your might, railing against the circumstances and challenges you face, but you can never add another single digit to the rule of 32.

So, in the end, IAE requires more than anything that you know who you are, what skills you bring to the operation and how much energy you can realistically bring to the day's events. Honestly valuing each of these is the most important step to bringing order to your day and harmony to your farm. Best wishes for much success this coming year. ✨

Andy Overbay holds a Ph.D. in ag education and has more than 40 years of hands-on dairy and farming experience.

ALLEN
HAY RAKES

**YOUR SOURCE FOR
GENUINE ALLEN RAKE
REPLACEMENT PARTS**

Carson City, NV | (775) 246-4555 | www.AllenFarmEquipment.com

... an approach I term 'IAE' – intelligent application of effort. IAE forces you to budget time during the work week to evaluate the priorities of the work ahead, come to a rational decision on the best path to accomplish your goals and move forward.



Illustration licensed from Thinkstock.