

What is the Most Important Component in Creating your Ag Legacy?

By Caleb Carter, UW Agriculture and Horticulture Educator

The Flying Diamond Ranch, sitting at the foot of the mountains, with numerous mountain streams flowing across the valley and green pastures full of cattle, was truly a beautiful spot. Harold's great grandfather had homesteaded the place and he could still remember listening to the stories about how it was back then. How they survived drought, wildfire, rustlers and much more to build what they had today. The family had been fortunate to continue to add to it over the years and now it was a respectable ranch with a rich history. They had even held their Centennial Celebration just a few years before, but Harold was frustrated that more of his kids hadn't come out for it.

As he thinks back over the years growing up and then raising a family of his own, Harold has many fond memories. They used to have such fun on the ranch. He can remember many times moving cattle, branding, feeding or just fixing fence with the kids by his side. Now it seems that they always have more important things to do. He wonders how to better convey his feelings and what the ranch means to him and those that went before. And he worries about what might happen if he isn't able to.

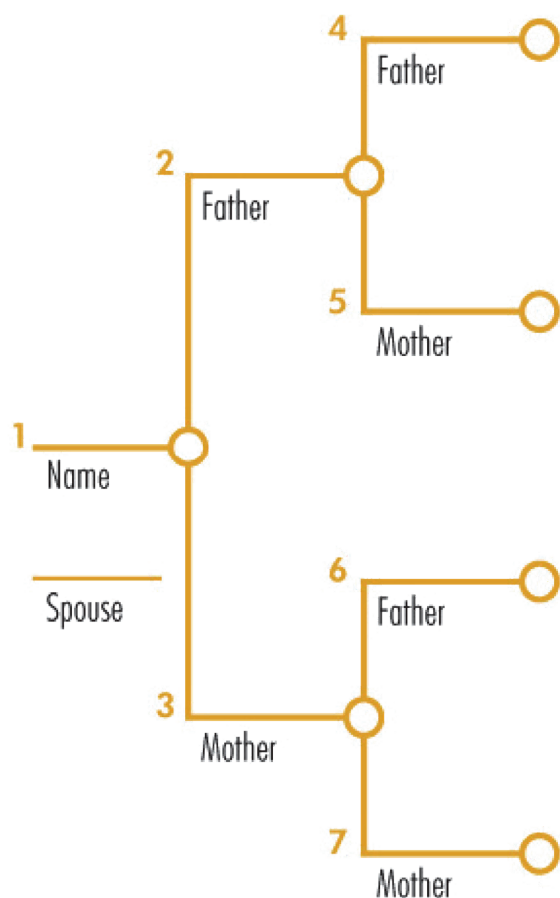
How can Harold convey these deep feelings and memories? How does he share the things he has learned over his many years. Will his children ever understand why this place is so important to him?

There are many obstacles that prevent families from discussing and planning for transition of the family farm or ranch to the next generation. To name just a few: not knowing where to start, who wants to take over and how, or just a lack of time to sit down and talk. Emotional ties are often an intrinsic aspect of ownership, as well as the founding generation's identity. Very often, attempts to open the conversation about transition of ownership or management of the operation can often lead to fights and rifts among family members. The founding generation may feel pushed out or unappreciated as the incoming generation wants to be more involved. Ag legacy can help to smooth the process by approaching the transition from the perspective of preserving family relationships and the founder's sense of identity through the concept of leaving a legacy.



Components of a Legacy

The Allianz Life Insurance Company of North America conducted a study in 2005 on people's beliefs and attitudes about the concept of legacy. They found that there are four components that lead to a complete legacy.



These include:

- Values and life lessons
- Personal possessions of emotional value
- Instructions and wishes to be fulfilled
- Financial assets/real estate

Results of the study raised some interesting questions. Families were excited to look at a legacy, where they are often uncomfortable discussing topics such as inheritance, as the concept takes into account all aspects of an individual's or family's legacy. They also found that both baby boomers and the elder generation believed that values and life lessons was the most highly valued out of these four components of a complete legacy. This was followed by the personal possessions of emotional value component, then instruction and wishes to be fulfilled, while finances were of least importance.

Values and Life Lessons

Sharing values and life lessons includes such things as personal and family traditions, stories, a sense of ethics and morality, faith and religious beliefs, hopes and blessings for future generations, and life experiences. The three main components of values and life lessons are:

- Family traditions
- Family history
- Belief systems



Family Traditions

Family traditions are practices or beliefs that create positive feelings and are repeated at regular intervals. They're more than routines or ordinary, everyday activities that require no special behavior and involve little emotion. Often traditions are handed down from generation to generation, but it can also be fun and exciting for families to look for opportunities to create their own traditions as well.

Some traditions are based on commandments, such as praying before meals.

Others extend from cultural or ethnic heritage, such as serving dumplings on cold winter nights. Traditions cultivate connection between immediate family members and between generations. There are three types of traditions:

- Celebration traditions: Things we do that are built around special occasions.
- Family traditions: Special activities that are created within each family to fit their lifestyle, such as vacations, family council, pizza night, etc.
- Patterned family interactions: Repeated events that are centered around everyday life. This could include dinner time, bed time, Sunday afternoons, etc.

Families that have the most traditions or rituals in their lives also have the strongest ties. Not only are family traditions fun, but they help to bring the family together. Traditions serve an important role in helping us see the value in time spent together. They are also opportunities for families to create good memories to build upon when times aren't so good.



Here are five reasons that help to explain the benefits of, and opportunities in, family traditions:

- Time to relate or communicate with one another: Family traditions give us a way to relate to one another and understand each other's needs, goals, and challenges in life.
- Help in adapting to new stages of development, crisis or the flow of events: Certain family traditions help to provide a framework that facilitates difficult transitions. Some examples of these are caring for family members, planning a weekly schedule, preparing meals together, or establishing a hand signal to say, "You have five more minutes."
- A time to heal and forgive from loss or disappointment in life: Use this time to talk about the good times and tell stories. Spend time together as a sign of cooperation and reconciliation.
- Time to affirm family values, faith and life experiences: Family activities, such as worshiping together, seasonal crafts, and decorating for holidays or special events help to affirm the family's values and beliefs.
- A time to celebrate together: Families need to celebrate the special events in their lives and the accomplishments of individual family members.



Family History

Genealogy and family history are often used interchangeably but have different meanings. Genealogy is searching out the names of family members, birth dates, marriage dates, locations, etc. Family history is the collecting of stories, events, memories, and more. Bringing them together will help to tell a family's story more completely.

Family histories may not include anyone famous, or infamous. However, they are of great value to the family, no matter what the tale. Many great stories can be found or shared that can bring a family's history to life. Discuss this as a family and decide how to begin to not only research past family history, but also preserve the stories of those living right now. This could be done by creating a book, scrapbook, video or audio recording, or a website.



Some items to consider when compiling a personal history for other family members include:

- Traditions and stories
- Ethics and morals
- Religious beliefs and activities
- Hopes and blessings for future generations
- Life experiences
- Schools and education
- Community service
- Military service

Beliefs

A person's beliefs are very important because those beliefs define the limit of that person's experience. A person's belief system is the set of precepts by which they live daily life and that govern their thoughts, words, and actions. A person they must define those things that they hold dear in order to identify their own core beliefs. This could be family, friends, education, hobbies, career, a car or boat, and anything else that stands out as important to them or in some way defines who they are. These core beliefs provide a person's values.

Values form the basis on which a person makes their decisions and that provide them with a foundation for associating and analyzing experiences. A person must take each item identified as important and explain why these things are important to them to outline their core values. This will help them identify what they believe in and value most in life.

Core values mature over time as a person adds to them with new experiences and knowledge. Organizing these experiences helps to handle future experiences and situations. Associating new knowledge and experience with existing knowledge can help people grow in understanding and confidence through life.

Documenting Values and Life Lessons

It is important not only to identify values and life lessons, but also to document them. This will help serve as a reference, as well as allow sharing with others. There are many ways to accomplish this, whether through ethical wills, letters, worksheets, video or audio recordings, websites, or scrapbooks. Here are some additional reasons to document values and life lessons:

- We all want to be remembered and we will leave something behind.
- If we don't tell our stories and the stories of our ancestors, they will be lost forever.
- It helps you identify what you value most and what you stand for.
- By articulating what we value now, we can take steps to insure the continuation of those values for future generations.
- You learn a lot about yourself in the process of writing an ethical will.
- It helps us come to terms with our mortality by creating something of meaning that will live on after we are gone.
- It provides a sense of completion in our lives.

Passing on an Ag Legacy

While planning for the succession of the family farm or ranch can be difficult, beginning by identifying the value's and life lessons that individual family members hold dear can help move the process towards defining the family's Ag legacy. Not only can this help bring the family closer together, but it can also help the founding generation feel that they are leaving something that will live on and enable the incoming generation to more fully-appreciate what has been left for them.

Portions of this article are adapted from an online course entitled *A Lasting Legacy* course 1, by Rodney Sharp, John P. Hewlett, and Jeffrey E. Tranel, 2007. The course is available free of charge at AGLEGACY.org > Learning.

An online module, including a recorded presentation covering values and life lessons and other information on developing your management succession plan is available at our website. For more on upcoming modules, past newsletters, and for information about Ag Legacy see AgLegacy.org. Requests for additional information may be emailed to Information@AgLegacy.org.



Ag Legacy Newsletter:

Contributing Authors -

Caleb Carter, ccarte13@uwyo.edu

John P. Hewlett, hewlett@uwyo.edu

Editing/Layout - John P. Hewlett, hewlett@uwyo.edu

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