

by RHONDA NIDA MCCURRY



SHOWING IN THE BEST LIGHT

There is a right way and a wrong way to show livestock. Not only do showmanship skills matter in the ring but also sportsmanship. Just like an athletic sport, exhibitors represent their industry, species and breed and therefore should be cordial, helpful and congratulatory to their peers.

That can be a tough pill to swallow when your prized heifer stands fifth in class or when your county fair champion barrow is sifted early at the state fair. While winning is always the desired outcome of a show project, industry leaders, judges, parents and advisors are often quick to say that losing actually teaches more about real life than taking home the big title.

learning by doing

Warren Beeler, Caneyville, Ky., has judged swine shows and showmanship contests for three decades. The Kentucky native says sportsmanship is absolutely critical – both in the showing and life outside of showing livestock.

Beeler is an advocate of livestock shows because he believes the environment provides a positive way to learn about sharing, responsibility, helping others and how to win and lose. Specifically, Beeler says being a good showman is an earned talent. It's not about having the best, most-expensive pig or the biggest truck and trailer but rather about working hard at home and having the courage to do the right thing when no one is looking.

“Sportsmanship is a courtesy thing,” he says. “Juniors have to help each other and congratulate the winner. If you'd rather blame the judge or something else for your loss, then you have wasted the opportunity to learn and progress. Life and showing pigs have a lot of losses. The way it's handled is a measurement of a person's individual development.”

In the swine arena, there is an unspoken urgency to be the first or last person in the ring. Beeler says the judge's first look at a pig and the showman is important, but he also knows to look toward the sorting gate and catch the attitude in a junior's eye. If they are excited and confident about their pig, he knows they are bringing something to watch. He doesn't, however, like to see juniors run over others to be

first through the gate and says they should respectfully enter, take their moment with the judge as they walk in, and then allow others the same opportunity until all pigs are in the ring.

“Take turns and be courteous,” Beeler says. “Entering the ring could be described as organized chaos, but there is a method to the madness. A kid who's really good at showmanship is special to watch. Showmanship is hog presentation and the great ones always have them looking good.”

Beeler looks for juniors who also exhibit patience. He says it is a hard talent for young people to capture, but it is a critical skill to have in the showing. Once while judging the Ohio State Fair, Beeler noticed a boy with a marginal Yorkshire barrow that worked with the pig effortlessly through the ring. The young man won the showmanship contest that day and Beeler stopped to ask him how he trained his pig to control him without touching the animal with the stick.

“He would put his stick down and that pig would immediately turn its head,” he says. “I asked him how he did that. He said his family had an abandoned farm house on their property and built a ramp to the front steps. The young man drove his pig through the house seven times a day, every day.”

Another tip is to avoid showing emotion or frustration in the ring. Beeler once saw a junior kick another's pig because he

wasn't placed as high as expected. At that moment, Beeler says, he jerked the kid's pig and placed him last.

“You have to learn how to win and lose,” he says. “There are kids who smile at me the whole time, but you're not going to smile your way into first place. Winning means you have to be good and lucky on the same day. By luck, I mean the judge catches you when you look the best. Being good gets you to the point where you can be lucky. Being all that on the same day is having the very best day.”

taking the lead

Tammy Wallace, Stotts City, Mo., has been around show cattle all of her life. As a native Missourian, she grew up showing Red Angus then married into an Angus operation – both breeds her family exhibits today. In the last few years, the family has also incorporated Simmental genetics into their herd.

Wallace judged the National Junior Angus Show showmanship contest in 2007. As she watches juniors move in and around of the ring, she likes to see someone who's relaxed, confident and neat in their appearance. Those individuals easily demonstrate their comfort level as an exhibitor and prove how much work they've put in at home.

When a junior enters the ring, she believes they should keep an eye on the judge and stay in a line dictated by the first animal in. This is a sportsmanship – not only showmanship – technique, because

a good showman follows the order of ring entry and does not try to outdo any other animal until it is picked by the judge.

“When lining up the first time, it is important to follow the person who leads the class in,” she says. “Even if the cattle in between you and the first person are in different spots, your animals front feet should be in the same line in the shavings as the first person. Also, when you’re in profile, keep your heifer in line with the heifer in front. Don’t stand out in front of the line up and bury others.”

For Wallace the single most important thing a good showman can do is walk the animal into show position. As cattle are creatures of habit, she says working with the animal at home can make this a realistic goal.

Wallace says she believes the only need for a show stick is for scratching or loining their top. In addition, walking a heifer or steer into a perfect show stance helps the animal become comfortable and means the exhibitor may not have to circle back into position, thus spending time watching the judge.

Leaving enough room in front of the calf in a profile position is also important. This manner of etiquette shows you know how to position yourself and that if the animal in front of you is pulled out, the exhibitor knows to move forward – and has enough room to do so.

“This is how you show courtesy to others,” Wallace says.

Sportsmanship lessons are often learned by example, Wallace says. A parent or advisor can help a junior become a good winner and a gracious loser and will make a big impact on the young person far beyond the showing. When things don’t go your way in the ring, Wallace says to keep emotions intact. While in the ring and the make-up area, people are constantly

watching. She says once the exhibitor and the animal are back in the stalls and in a quiet place, is it okay to shed some tears or sit down to avoid anger.

“Everyone wants to win, but that’s not going to happen every day,” Wallace says. “We have to teach our kids at a young age the things that are important carry through life. Sportsmanship is something we use every day, whether it’s showing cattle, at home with family or at school.”

sheep sportsmanship

Chelsea Clifton, Kingfisher, Okla, is a recent graduate of the sheep showing. Having grown up showing across the country, she is now judging sheep shows and showmanship contests, and working for the Oklahoma Youth Expo. Clifton is set to judge the 2012 Ohio State Fair showmanship contest and judged the Belt Buckle Bonanza sheep showmanship contest last year, as well.

Clifton says she notices sheep exhibitors who enter the ring with poise and confidence. A junior who is methodical in their movements, has a plan of when and how to set up feet and keeps their eye on the judge stands out in her mind. As a young judge, she appreciates the intensity many juniors feel when they enter the ring but she doesn’t like to see an exhibitor who is jumpy or too aggressive. It’s all about poise, Clifton says.

“The comfort level of that exhibitor reflects their character and attitude,” she says. “The junior show arena gives students an opportunity to learn responsibility and traits of the industry as well or better than any athletic sport. For this reason, sportsmanship must be at the top of your to-do list.”

Clifton appreciates when a junior, who might have finished low in the class, comes up to shake her hand. This acknowledgement is a thank you and shows that no matter where they’re placed,

the exhibitor is grateful for the experience.

She also says age doesn’t matter in the showing. Clifton has seen extraordinary showman who were only 10 years old, but she knows they’ve arrived at that point due to hard work at home.

“It all pays off in the ring,” she says. “I can tell showman who have strong work ethic and are truly there because they love what they’re doing. That passion for the industry keeps every evaluator going.”

If a junior is fortunate to win and take photos at the backdrop, Clifton likes to see humility and humbleness in the young person. The backdrop can be a high-stress place due to crowds of people, multiple conversations and trying to take a good picture, while working with the photographer. Clifton says this is a place juniors will interact with show and award sponsors, so maintaining a calm, positive attitude is a must in this setting.

“If you’ve won grand or reserve champion, the animal might be tired since it’s probably been in the ring quite a while,” she says. “Don’t use excessive force like slapping at backdrop, because there’s not a worse place to show negative emotion than when you’re surrounded by the judge, sponsors and family. Also, be aware that you are representing the 1,400-head show you just won, and little eyes are upon you. Make sure you are a good example.”

Clifton reminds juniors that the project and the showing experience are bigger than any one individual.

“Keep all that in mind when you’re out there, because it’s easy to get caught up in the moment,” she says. “It’s about being part of an industry and a show program that’s been going on forever. And it’s the junior’s responsibility to give a positive outlook and image because it can carry on for generations after them.”



1. Tammy Wallace says when things don't go your way in the ring, keep emotions intact. Remember people are constantly watching. Until the exhibitor and the animal are back in the stalls and in a quiet place, maintain your composure. Then it is okay to shed some tears or sit down to avoid anger.

2. Chelsea Clifton says the showing is a perfect place to demonstrate an exhibitor's true reaction to winning and losing. If a junior plans to raise and market their own livestock after their show career is complete, they should remember that reputation is everything.

3. Warren Beeler says every pig has a perfect speed and juniors should know that about their animal. Being slow and courteous avoids the rush of the animal, making it look better in the ring.