

The Dispatch

Family Business Insight for your Agriculture Company
December 2023: A Gallery of Gifts

This month we are blessed to have friends of the Dispatch share stories of meaningful gifts they've received. Laurie Henry, who farms in Iowa with her husband and sons, shares the memories made by her grandmother's special attention to unique Christmas gifts. Ken Rinkenberger recalls how a mentor's brief instruction had an impact on his career, which spanned 50+ years in the seed and crop protection market. And Kristin Duncanson, who farms in Minnesota with her family and leads industry sustainability strategies, recounts the joy of children gifting something as simple as time. We hope their stories prompt you to treasure gifts received--and create valuable gifts to share. --Davon

The Gift of Memories

Laurie Henry

When Davon asked me to write this article, I thought it would be easy. It wasn't! It wasn't that I haven't received some great gifts over the years. I just couldn't come up with the "best" gift. What initially came to mind weren't things that I unwrapped or pulled from boxes; they were special times spent with people I love.

However, there is one rather strange gift... One year, as we opened presents on Christmas morning, my grandmother told me that I still had one more gift, but it wasn't under the tree. Rather, it was "in" the tree. After some searching, I found an oddly shaped ornament that hadn't been there before. It looked like a pendant, made of folded cardboard covered with red felt and ribbon décor. "Gee thanks" was probably my initial response, until I discovered that if you squished it just right, it would split open to reveal a small gift tucked inside.

Every year my grandmother would faithfully fill that ornament with something unique: a piece of heirloom jewelry, a small miniature teddy bear, a woven pine needle basket, a sketch of a duck all rolled up and tied with a ribbon. Nothing expensive, just handmade gifts that made me feel special. And now as I hang that ornament on the tree, the memories of more than fifty years ago are priceless.

In some ways I am surprised that this is the "best" gift that keeps coming to mind, but I love the reminder that often the simplest things, from special people, leave the deepest impression. So, as I ponder what to buy my grandchildren this year, I am challenged to find ways to create memories like my grandmother did for me. The toys and things that sparkle are fun but will probably be forgotten. My greatest desire in giving gifts is to give memories that will last.

The Gift of Confidence

Ken Rinkenberger

"Take me to the airport." Those were the words of my boss on the eighth day of a ten-day business trip through the High Plains in 1974, the first year of my career. One easy sentence. Five words. But that simple act became the catalyst that gave me the Gift of Confidence at a very early stage in my career.

Here is how it happened. Six months into my career, the company moved me into a role in a new Market Research department managed by Paul Johanson. A pioneer in the industry, Paul's first assignment was to help Funk's better understand the sorghum seed market. He decided we would start by listening to sorghum growers through leading a series of fifteen focus groups in four states over ten days.

We started in South Dakota, worked our way through Nebraska and Kansas, and finally arrived in Texas. Paul would run the group, demonstrating various techniques to optimize the outcome, and then we would listen to the tape of the session and critique it as we drove to the next town. On Day 4, it was my turn to lead. After each session, we would drive, listen, and critique. It was painful, but his tips made sense and I knew the process was intended to accelerate my personal development.

After directing six or seven groups in Kansas and Nebraska, we entered Texas, where we had scheduled four more meetings. As we were driving past Amarillo, Paul said: "Take me to the airport. I have things to do back at the office, and you are ready to fly on your own."

WOW, what a vote of confidence! I was overwhelmed but grateful, scared but calmly ready for my next group. It was an early mentoring experience that not only gave me the Gift of Confidence but taught me how to mentor others effectively throughout my career.

The Gift of Time

Kristin Duncanson

Our time is not our own. We were bought with a price and now it belongs to Him. Time is a gift given by God for us to steward. 1 Corinthians 7:23, paraphrased

Over the past 65 years I have received a lot of great gifts, and I would like to think I have given some great gifts to friends and family too. One of the most significant recent gifts to me was from my daughter.

She, now married and with kids of her own, called a few months ago and asked if we could go together as a family somewhere "up north" in Minnesota during the summer months. "Mom," she said, "I just want to hang out with my brothers and let my kids get to know them." Mind you—this is the daughter (and sister) who spent months avoiding her brothers while growing up. Now, she wants her kids to know them? Oh my! How marvelous!

Our kids are spread-out in the country, and we try to get together to celebrate the holidays and special occasions. Traveling isn't as fun or easy as it used to be, but we are so grateful that the idea of spending time together in the slower, summer months on Minnesota's beautiful North Shore was very well received by our entire crew. Don't get me wrong, it will be an undertaking. Young kids, dogs, cats, aging grandparents (us), busy work schedules and many obligations will need to be considered before we go. But they all seem thrilled to make it happen.

Some of my most memorable life events, as I think of it, include the offer of someone to spend time with me. A cup of coffee with a friend to celebrate a birthday or to just catch up, sledding with grandkids, being invited to a concert with a high school classmate or travel with my husband. And, of course, a family time "up north!" These all are precious times. As I head into the holidays I do so with the feeling that time is not something we can regain. Give it graciously and steward it well.