What Skills Should a New Graduate Possess for the Employer?

By John Paterson, NCBA Executive Director of Education

Many college graduations start the middle of May. I was curious what professors and employers believe are the ideal qualities for a new graduate. I sought the opinions of nationally respected university professors and industry professionals. Here are their answers.

Dan Kniffen – Professor of Animal Science, Penn State University

The 2014 NCRA program will need to be prepared to go to work. One of the greatest challenges will be preparing students for the daily demands of the working world. Employers will pursue individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to showing up on time and completing a full day. Education will be assumed. If you have attended school they will anticipate you should have acquired a level of skill and problem solving. The next generation of employers will look for the individual who has displayed a level of leadership and one that assumes responsibility as they move through their undergraduate program.

Communication will become even more important. As students become more attached to electronic devices and lose the interpersonal skill of one-on-one or group communication, the ability to engage people in communication and meaningful networking gives me an indication of their passion for the job they are applying for. Quite often that depth of knowledge is somewhat shallow due to inexperience, but that is ok because much of the required knowledge will be taught to them if they are selected for a position.

In searching out good young talent I always look for the basics first. Are they smart and wise (smart comes from a book, wise comes from experience)? Do they have the ability to work with other people and be an active and welcomed participant in a team setting? Are they passionate and motivated for the right purpose, which should be to showcase their talent and not just position themselves to move up the next rung of the ladder?

An employer, which should be the employer, is looking for the individual who has displayed leadership, the ability to solve problems and to make decisions and/or recommendations to supervisors; a basic understanding of finances, profitability and return on investment; the ability to work in a team and independently; a positive attitude; a willingness to start at an entry level position and work your way up; and a lifelong willingness to learn.

Mike Siemons – Cargill Meat Solutions

When visiting with new interns or recruits we always find out the basics such as their academic strengths and weaknesses and GPA. I also try to find out their depth of knowledge of the potential job that they are applying for. Quite often that depth of knowledge is somewhat shallow due to inexperience, but that is ok because much of the required knowledge will be taught to them if they are selected for a position.

By Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Specialist

With low cattle numbers in some areas of the United States, producers would like to expand their beef herds. However, in much of the western part of the Southern Plains, Mother Nature has not cooperated. Many producers are currently being faced with limited forage availability due to drought and, in a few cases, wildfires.

One of the first management tools that should be evaluated by cow-calf producers is to cull poorer producing cows and capture their value at a time when the prices for cows and culled replacement heifers are strong and allow for some capital investment to be made. Replacing heifers that were properly developed and matched to a fertile bull or a well-organized AI program should be used.

Greg Lardy – Animal Science Department Head, North Dakota State University and President, American Society of Animal Science

In addition to a degree from an accredited institution, graduates need the following:

Excellent communication skills (both written and oral), demonstrated leadership skills/experience, the ability to think critically and keen understanding that we live in a global society; the ability to analyze data to solve problems and to make decisions and/or recommendations to supervisors; a basic understanding of finances, profitability and return on investment; the ability to work in a team and independently; a positive attitude; a willingness to start at an entry level position and work your way up; and a lifelong willingness to learn.

Terry Lipsky – Former Professor, University of Missouri and Retired EVP, American Simmental Association

Be sure to know the demands for intellect, experience, work ethic and personality. No person is perfect, so plan which of the above your team can advance/improve. Experience and work ethic are the result of good mentoring. Intellect and personality modifications are tough to teach. Be wary of references. I’m jaded, but a large proportion of references evaluate the candidates as far too superior. Be sure your team’s evaluation is similar to the references.

I think students that have significant work experiences, especially interactive work-sets, have been more successful. Of course, this depends on the position description, but one of the most common factors of employee failure is inability to get along with others. Experiences in meeting customer satisfaction and service are often a trait of employee success.

You probably think this is old-fashioned, but three things often explain the potential of a candidate: How they look, how they talk and how they write. Finally, passion. Indicators of real passion for the goals of our businesses, and usually, the vision that winning is a team thing makes all the difference between a super successful hire and “just another person in the bunch.”

Culling Order for Fall-Calving Herds When Forage is Limited

We have a Winner!

Congratulations to Chris and Jenny Meints from Cortland, Neb., for winning the 2014 NCRA Photo Contest! The picture will be featured on the May 6 episode of Cattlemen to Cattlemen.

This photo was taken at Meints Farm and Cattle at sunset. We had many great photo submissions, but our Facebook followers voted and this was the favorite.