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## **Critical Thinking For Beef Cattle Production Systems - Part 2**

Recently we introduced Critical Thinking For Beef Cattle Production Systems – Part 1 with an introduction to the process of critical thinking and why it is important. As a review from the conclusion in Part 1, a good way to summarize critical thinking is a quote from Dr. J. E. McPeck in Critical Thinking and Education when he defines critical thinking ability as “the skill to engage in an activity with reflective skepticism”. He further states that “critical thinking requires the judicious use of skepticism, tempered by experience, such that is productive of a more satisfactory solution or insight into, the problem at hand”. In other words - How do I take what I know and what I can learn from others coupled with my experiences and theirs; add to that the realities of the situation and come up with a profitable solution to the complexities of making a profit with a cow herd. And can I be reflectively skeptical enough to know when the facts are the correct ones to solve the problem; or even if I am asking the right questions.

Beef production today is a serious, capital intensive, high risk, high profit potential business and as such is a business where you can also quickly go bankrupt from making mistakes; and mistakes are easy to make. “Certainly there is more than one way to ranch successfully, but there has to be at least a thousand ways to do it wrong”, is a quote to keep in mind. How do we avoid mistakes? By being or becoming a critical thinker who evaluates information without emotion. One who can separate fact from fiction; accurate and valid information from that which is misleading, deceptive or fraudulent; and decide what is relevant and irrelevant.

Critical thinking takes a lot of mental effort and requires discipline. You must avoid peer

pressure and salesmanship. You must learn how to ask questions and gather information from valid and trusted sources. You must develop relationships with people whom you trust to help evaluate your options. You must constantly re-evaluate your decisions to be relatively certain of a positive (profitable) outcome.

In any discussion of critical thinking two thoughts seem to come to the forefront: Honest Self-Assessment and Humility. As described in Part 1 of this series humans seem to have an unending ability for self-deception. It's easy to be lulled into truly believing it is your business smarts and understanding of the cattle industry, your ability to work hard, or other perceived strengths that are the sole reasons for your success and profitability. It's even easier to overlook your weaknesses. The flip side is humility which is recognizing your strengths and also recognizing your weaknesses. "Humility is an awareness that your individual talents alone are inadequate to the tasks that have been assigned to you", David Brooks, The Road to Character.

Ranchers who use critical thinking to solve real world problems and do so profitably are in an excellent position for the cattle industry of the future. But critical thinking is not learned by osmosis nor inherited, it is acquired and remains an on-going process. You must commit to being a life-long learner of a variety of skills by extensive reading, attending educational programs, observing results and having a network of trusted experts to call on for advice, constructive criticism and feedback. Finally you must continually evaluate your thought processes and perceived knowledge base and constantly engage in honest debate with others who have earned your respect and trust. In Part 3, we will extend this discussion by looking at problem solving with a real example plaguing many in our industry by using critical thinking skills to determine a profitable outcome for the cow herd.

The Spitzer family invites you to their twenty third annual **BULL SALE** scheduled for **Saturday, February 27, 2016**. Their **Summer Newsletter** should be mailed soon and if you wish your name added to their mailing list call 864/972-9140, send a note to their **NEW EMAIL ADDRESS ([info@srbulls.com](mailto:info@srbulls.com))** or write SPITZER RANCH, 1511 HWY 59, Fair Play, SC, 29643 In the summer newsletter will be a Bull Test Performance Report to date for those bulls being developed for the 2016 bull sale. Additionally they always include educational tips, inspiration and insights into a variety of timely topics of interest to those cattlemen whose goal is increased profitability. The SPITZER RANCH Facebook page has exploded with “Likes” and there are now some 1825 followers of their posts and QUOTE OF THE WEEK. For the most current information about the Spitzer Ranch Program and the Annual February Bull Sale be sure to visit their WEB SITE at [www.srbulls.com](http://www.srbulls.com).

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