

Drs. Robert Krigel and David Brandt in their acclaimed best seller, *Sacred Cows Make the Best Burgers*, teach us how to round up sacred cows—those outdated forms, practices, values, and beliefs that waste our resources and keep us from achieving our outcomes—and create change-ready people and organizations.

The authors define a sacred cow as “a plodding bovine mammal of dubious intelligence (and) regarded in some climes as holy in origin and therefore immune from ordinary treatment.” They go on to describe the business “sacred cow” as “an outmoded belief, assumption, practice, policy, system, or strategy, generally invisible, (which) inhibits change and prevents responsiveness to new opportunities.”

Krigel and Brandt tell us that they are out there . . . herds of them . . . choking off productivity and trampling creative thinking. These “old, mildewed, obsolete ideas” no longer work in the fast paced climate of today’s problems and needs. They tell us that these cows roam our agencies and we continue to “worship” those things that got us results many years ago. But in today’s volatile environments, old ways and sacred cows are a stone around our necks.

While our change focus is often technology, systems, processes, and the like, Krigel and Brandt suggest that we focus on the people who must implement the change. “Why? Because when you get right down to it, people are the obstacles. The key . . . is implementation. And that’s about people. People have to execute. They have to support the new system or it will go nowhere.”

Sacred Cows presents a five step process to motivate and create change ready people. Steps include:

1. Challenging your well-worn beliefs, assumptions, and practices and identifying those that have outlived their usefulness.
2. Creating an environment in which people are more open to innovation and new ideas.
3. Coaching yourself and others to recognize and overcome the four resistances to change.
4. Getting people excited about the change and motivated to act.
5. Cultivating the personal characteristics need to thrive in a changing environment.

Let’s look at a couple of suggestions related to step #1.

Krigel and Brandt say that complaints are often sightings of sacred cows in disguise. They suggest we listen when several people tell us something is a waste of time, doesn’t work, or is redundant. By giving permission and encouragement to complain, people will develop an interest in hunting sacred cows. The authors suggest you have people complete sentences like the following:

This job would be great if I didn't have to . . .

What a pain it is to . . .

No one reads this _____ so why am I doing it?

It's a waste of time to . . .

I could be much more productive if I didn't have to . . .

We could save a lot of money if we stopped . . .

Another way to “flush” a sacred cow is to keep a daily log of **everything** you do in a week, not just essential activities. Then ask yourself why you are doing it . . . what is the rationale?

The authors suggest the following questions rated on a scale of 1 (definitely NO) to 5 (definitely YES):

Does this activity:

- Add value to the product or customer?
- Improve quality?
- Improve service (make you more responsive to the customer)?
- Improve productivity (cuts cost directly)?
- Improve communication?
- Increase employee motivation or morale?
- Encourage innovation?
- Speed up decision making?

You can set your own criteria for what constitutes a “sacred cow” . . . but Krigel and Brandt say if a rated activity doesn't score a “4” on at least one question, it should be put out to pasture.

Another activity you might consider is imagining what would happen if “it” didn't exist. What would be the positive and negative consequences . . . real consequences, without all the gloom and doom prophecies . . . if the report isn't written, the meeting isn't held, etc.

Other questions to consider:

- Is it already being done by someone else? Are we duplicating effort?
- How and when did this practice come into being, and who started it?
- Can another person, department, or entity do it faster, better, more easily?

Sacred Cows is filled with good information. Use *Cows* to help you manage the constantly changing environment of child welfare. Your Practice Improvement Specialist can help you with this process. Call 717 795 9048.