

# Livestock Showing Teaches Life Lessons

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Jan 27, 2017

At nearly every cattle show I attend with my kids, the judge offers a few extra words of wisdom prior to selecting the grand champion. Our recent trip to the National Western Stock Show in Denver was no different.

My daughter, Cassidy, was fortunate enough to place first or second in her class with her market steer each of the last four years.

*“Surround yourself with good people and keep dreaming.”*

Dave Duello

Those steers have returned to the ring later, to walk across the green carpet in hopes of being named grand or reserve champion. During this year’s show, judge, Dave Duello said something I won’t soon forget. Duello said, “Surround yourself with good people and keep dreaming.”

No matter what you are doing or where you are going, that is true.

We often wonder if our children hear these wise words, given by folks over microphones. I was pleased to realize Cassidy did listen. She later posted something on social media including the quote.

I grew up in the livestock industry and have gained so many benefits. I’ve spent wonderful time with my family, learned a strong work ethic, built friendships and have been able to pass this experience on to my children.

The relationships I’ve built have spread all across the country. Some of these friends are still involved in the industry, others have pursued different avenues. Through social media, I have been able to reconnect with friends from my days showing cattle.

A recent conversation with one friend made me realize even more how fortunate we have been to be raised in the livestock show industry. In an email exchange, he wrote this:

*One of my earliest memories happened at a cattle show, when I was just three years old. Mom, Dad and I took a Shorthorn steer to the old Chicago International Livestock Exposition. Now, there was probably no shortage of rooms at Chicago’s inns, but we didn’t stay in them. Instead, we bedded down in sleeping bags on the straw, right next to the steers. I loved every minute of my first show, especially when we won the Shorthorn division.*

*A few years later, when I was seven, I showed a heifer for the first time, placed second in class, and knew I never wanted to stand in second place again. And now, nearly 40 years after leading that heifer in the ring, I still think about showing cattle almost every day – from brushing hair three times a day and showmanship practice at home, to the rush you get from entering the ring, and the euphoria when the judge slaps your steer, to the lifelong friendships we built outside the ring.*

*And the good news is, life doesn't end because you turn 18 and stop showing livestock. The lessons learned on a farm and showing livestock can make you an incredibly disciplined, goal-oriented and successful person beyond your wildest dreams.*

*So my advice to young people today who love showing cattle would be: 1) Appreciate the opportunity your parents, grandparents and others are giving you and the sacrifices they're making, 2) Never take a moment for granted. Prepare to win by working the extra hours with your animals, and enjoy every second at the shows with your animals, and 3) When you get home, reflect often on what you've learned, and what you can do better. There is always room for improvement.*

*Another great memory: I was once showing a steer at a county fair, indoors, on one of the hottest summer days I can remember. A huge American flag hung from the rafters, and the judge was our friend Gene Doran. During his remarks, Gene said, **"I want everyone to look up at that American flag, and remember that we live in the greatest country in the world. All you boys and girls out here – when you leave today, give your parents a hug and tell them thanks. There is no greater activity youth can be involved in than with livestock."***

*The sweat rolling down my face mixed with more than a few tears, which I quickly tried to wipe away. But I'm sure Gene saw them as he walked over and shook my hand.*

Thank you, Matt Carrothers. To hear those words from a long-time friend who has been away from the industry for quite a few years is confirmation enough for me that the livestock industry is where I want to be and where I want my kids to grow up. I can thank my family and the people with whom I showed for that.

Never forget where your roots are, where you learned how to solve problems, work hard and build relationships. It pays off in the classroom, in athletics, in work and other activities. And remember to thank those who helped get you there.

