

hogs if feral hogs are introduced into local herds either intentionally or if they enter pastures or pens containing domestic hog herds. Another disease of particular concern to the commercial hog industry is pseudorabies. Despite its name, this disease is not related to rabies; it is actually a herpes virus, that does not affect people. However, pseudorabies can greatly affect the economic viability of the domestic hogs industry if the disease is transmitted into local domestic herds from feral hog populations. If that happens, the disease can directly restrict trade with other countries. In domestic hogs, clinical signs of the disease range from unapparent to fatal. Adult feral hogs that do recover from pseudorabies can develop latent infections and spread the virus indefinitely; that is why they pose a significant threat to the hog industry.

The WS' National Wildlife Research Center Field Station located in Kingsville, Texas, is currently conducting research on ways to control overpopulations of feral hogs, and researchers

are looking at innovative ways to reduce the threat and presence of feral hog diseases. Currently, there are 12 WS research studies on hogs. These include electric fencing to inhibit feral hog movements, identifying potential chemical attractants, evaluating effective baits to deliver pharmaceuticals to feral hogs, looking at the incidence and risk of feral hog interactions with domestics swine, looking at the economic implications of research to control feral hogs, and several others.

With the feral hog population estimated to be >4 million in the United States—and the number is growing—it's extremely unlikely that they will ever be eradicated completely. I firmly believe, however, that there is still much we can do to effectively manage this issue. The problems and conflicts caused by these animals did not happen overnight, and they won't be solved immediately; it will take time, resources, continued research, and a collective effort from all of us if we are to be successful. *

The role of knowledge in developing people skills

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AS I NOTED in the last issue of *Human–Wildlife Conflicts*, wildlife professionals have historically been lambasted for poorly-developed people skills (West 2007). Moreover, I suggested that full development of any skill relies on knowledge, practice, and feedback. To become a top-notch golfer, for example, one must intellectually understand many things, including rules of the game, layout of golf courses, biomechanics of swinging a golf club, situational advantages and disadvantages or different sized clubs, and many other things. However, to have that knowledge is not enough to be a great golfer; one must also apply that knowledge to the game through practice, again and again. Finally, without feedback, one would never know whether improvement was occurring and would thus never be able to refine his technique to become better. Knowledge, practice, and feedback are absolute requirements for the full development of any skill.



Ben C. West

To develop better skills for dealing with other people, one must also rely on these 3 facets of skill development. In the wildlife profession, we often make the mistake of not engaging any of these 3 components fully when trying to become better at dealing with people. But, I believe the

most commonly overlooked facet of people-skill development in our profession is knowledge. We in our profession simply do not explore the body of knowledge available to help us better understand the dynamics of interpersonal and public relations. Knowledge—the intellectual understanding of key principles and concepts underlying our interactions with others—is a prerequisite to developing better people skills. Unfortunately, many wildlife professionals believe developing these skills is simply a matter of time and experience and thus never consider learning some key principles that would help them develop better people skills.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggested that “leadership is an identifiable set of skills and practices....” Indeed, it is a fairly easy activity to create a list of skills that allow us to better interact with other people. In fact, I often begin my leadership workshops with a class discussion around this very question: what skills does one need to work effectively with other people? The lists we’ve generated in numerous workshops across the country have been remarkably similar: interpersonal communication, public speaking, time management, writing, conflict resolution, team-building, and dealing with personality differences or difficult people. This list, generated by hundreds of wildlife biologists at our workshops, defines some of the important skills one needs to interact effectively with others. Importantly, substantial resources exist in the form of publications, live workshops, online training, and other sources provide a wellspring of knowledge to help us better develop these skills (Figure 1).

The paradigms underlying successful interactions with others reflect both art and science. Certainly, some of the information available about interpersonal relations is subjective, but it has value nonetheless, just as *A Sand County Almanac* (Leopold 1949) is subjective but valuable. However, just as in our wildlife profession, the movement has been toward scientifically examining principles related to leadership, communication, and dealing with people. For example, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a popular instrument and concept to help individuals to better understand their personality preferences and those of other people, and to use that knowledge to better cope with the diversity of personalities. Fortunately,

MBTI is backed by a growing body of evidence to suggest that there are observable differences in people’s basic personality preferences, that those preferences lead to predictable tendencies, and that an understanding of those tendencies can help one to better interact with other people (Bayne 2005).

Numerous credible references exist to help one think about a myriad of aspects of communication, leadership, and interaction with others. For example, Kouzes and Posner (2002) summarize 20 years of research to answer the basic question: “What constitutes effective leadership?” Cialdini (1993) and Gardner (2004) review diverse psychological research to help explain why and how people make decisions. Susskind and Field (1996) draw on science, case studies, and experience to illustrate successful and unsuccessful strategies of managing conflict in the public arena. Weissman (2006) incorporates perception psychology, communication theory, and practical experience to outline successful strategies and techniques of public speaking. In addition to these books, a wide variety of workshops, online courses, and seminars is available to teach key principles.

Most wildlife professionals do not take advantage of the plethora of resources available to them to increase their knowledge about people management. As just one example, I once overheard a wildlife administrator proclaim proudly, “I’ve never read any of that leadership mumbo jumbo, and I never will!” Less extreme versions of this attitude pervade the wildlife profession. Many wildlife biologists report that people problems constitute their most significant professional challenges, and yet they do little in terms of critical study and analysis to learn concepts and principles to help them better understand and mitigate those problems.

Knowledge is a key facet of skill development. As many sports coaches have preached to their players, “perfect practice makes perfect.” Without a foundation of correct principles and concepts, continued practice and experience only reinforces bad practices and habits. In the wildlife profession, we can and should do a much better job of incorporating knowledge about leadership, communication, and dealing with people into our everyday activities.

Of course, simply understanding how to interact with people is not sufficient, one must

actually do it. In my next column, I discuss the importance of practice and application in developing better people skills. ★



FIGURE 1. A variety of books, courses, and other resources are available with information about leadership, communication, and interpersonal relations. (See bibliography below.)

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