

To Prospective Participants,

Because I won't have the opportunity to visit with most of you who receive this brochure, the purpose of this letter is share with you what I tell the people who call.

Over the past 16 years, the TEPAP program has given me the opportunity to get to know some of the best farmers and ranchers in North America. They have covered the spectrum of commodity producers, differentiated product/niche market operations, and qualified suppliers for coordinated supply chains. They have represented a variety of business arrangements and have included everything from single-site farms and ranches to multi-county, multi-state and even multi-national operations. However, nearly all have been closely held family and owner-managed businesses. Only 12 of the nearly 1000 participants to date have been employees of publicly traded, investor owned companies.



I can't tell anyone that the program is just what they need or that it will meet all their expectations. But, I can tell you what it is designed to do and how I answer some of the more frequently asked questions.

TEPAP is built around the following 6 principles:

- The only truly sustainable competitive advantage is the ability to learn and adapt faster than your competition.
- The best organizations spend as much time analyzing what they need to stop doing as they do evaluating new opportunities.
- The most successful businesses are learning organizations. This means that everyone in the business needs to recognize that someone, somewhere, has a better idea or way of doing things, and they need to be compelled to find it, learn it, adapt it, and continually improve it.
- When the rate of change inside an organization becomes slower than the rate of change outside, its end is in sight. The only question is when.
- The main difference between the top 10 percent and the rest of the top 25 percent is their timing, both in terms of entry and exit, whether its an investment, a marketing decision or a business activity.
- The future will always belong to those who see the possibilities before they become obvious to the typical producer.

There is no question that the program is expensive relative to traditional extension, commodity association and farm organization programs. At the same time, its cost is low relative to comparable business school executive education programs. Most farmers and ranchers I know own an ATV, jet ski, snowmobile or motorcycle, and frequently more than one. Knowing what they cost, it obviously isn't as much a matter of spending the money as it is whether you believe TEPAP can have a more positive impact on your business than other places you have or will choose to use the funds.

The program offers no guarantee of success; but, it will broaden your

perspective, expose you to alternative points of view and in the long run should help improve your odds.

The faculty comes from throughout the country - from the private sector, from land grant universities and from business schools. At the end of the program, I meet with each class for a debriefing to take the program apart. Rather than reacting to a few strong negative or positive comments, I want a consensus opinion of what feedback I need to give the faculty, which faculty members or topics need to be changed, and what topics that aren't included need to be added. Continuous improvement in the program is just as important as it is in your business.

Regardless of how good the faculty is, you will learn as much from the other participants as you do the instructors. Every year I talk to participants who have been thinking about doing something for years; but, family, friends or neighbors have convinced them that it was too high risk or had already been tried and didn't work. Then they meet someone at the program who is already doing it.

About 80 percent of those who start the program finish both years. TEPAP isn't a silver bullet. It is unlikely that it will be a life saver for a business that is on its last leg. While a light at the end of the tunnel may appear for some, the objective is to challenge your thinking, to open you up to new possibilities and to help you manage your business more strategically.

The final question I am usually asked is what is available in the way of continuing education and networking after someone finishes the program. For those who are interested, 12 years ago the graduates of TEPAP formed the Association of Agricultural Production Executives (AAPEX). This group holds a 3-day annual meeting at different locations throughout the country. The meetings include practitioner panels, seminars, case studies, and topical roundtables. The organization has also sponsored overseas management study trips and conferences with major agribusiness firms. Some graduates attend every year, others participate when the topics or location fit their interests and schedule. In any event, all TEPAP graduates receive an agenda and invitation each year.

Whether or not you decide to attend TEPAP, I wish you the best in your future endeavors.

Danny Klinefelter