

SWINE SOLUTIONS

Building a better you:

Improving your swine business through the Start-Stop-Continue exercise

The Start-Stop-Continue exercise is a simple but useful tool for both personal and team development. As individuals, we're always tempted to do more, but we don't often evaluate what we should stop doing. The Start-Stop-Continue exercise helps us focus on what's important and should be done, what's not valuable and could be discontinued and, finally, what's working well that should be continued.

"I've done this exercise with customers a number of times and, each time, the participants leave with a clearer understanding of how to prioritize their actions, both personally and professionally," said Dr. Stewart Galloway, senior swine nutritionist with Hubbard Feeds.

Dr. Galloway demonstrated the Start-Stop-Continue exercise at two of his recent swine peer group meetings. These meetings are meant to encourage discussion and interaction among the producers in attendance, allowing owners and managers to share information and ultimately learn from each other. A summary of the responses from those meetings is included below.

Phase 1: START

Question 1: What are some of the initiatives you started in the past year to help achieve your goals?

Question 2: What new attitudes or behaviors did you initiate?

- Empowering employees by properly training and equipping them with the necessary tools for success
- Sending recap notes after meetings with employees
- Becoming aware of the importance of the first interaction with employees every day
- Managing and organizing day-to-day schedules with a daily planner
- Focusing on working as a team by cross-training and cross-team interactions
- Creating an employee handbook and having employees acknowledge receipt of handbook through a signed agreement
- Cleaning up and decluttering for appearance, rodent control, safety and improved morale
- Implementing a business transition process to hire and train replacements for a key manager who is retiring
- Hiring Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) to work part-time in farrowing and nursery barns
- Working with a recordkeeping program to create useful reports
- Addressing problems in a timely manner

Phase 2: STOP

Question 1: What are some of the things keeping you from achieving your goals?

Question 2: What are you doing that is irrelevant to or is working against your goals?

- Allowing family members to stop by the office to visit too often, and feeling the need to entertain them, even when it's busy
- Tolerating negative employees because of the tight job market
- Avoiding confrontation
- Taking on too much and not delegating tasks
- Getting bogged down in minor details and not looking at the bigger picture
- Avoiding priority projects
- Taking every phone call
- Ignoring the marketing plan

-continued on next page

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Phase 3: CONTINUE

Question 1: What are you working on that you believe you should keep doing?

Question 2: What are you currently doing that is consistent and aligns with your stated goals?

- Looking at the big picture and delegating tasks and responsibilities to employees
- Training employees and equipping them with the tools they need to succeed
- Making time for family
- Keeping an open mind about alternative solutions to challenges on the farm
- Remembering to take a step back to assess the situation instead of making a rash decision
- Being a good listener and thinking about the other person when interacting with them
- Reading, learning and striving for answers, as well as adapting to change
- Working on priority projects that align with your goals
- Being aware of how you communicate; for example, when sending messages, starting off with a greeting instead of going straight to business and tasks
- Creating and carrying a weekly report to highlight that week's talking or focus points
- Providing one positive note to boost morale, along with one or two notes for improvement
- Leading and managing by example
- Remembering to continue working on your business instead of in your business
- Working on the farm business transition plan
- Keeping safety top of mind
- Continuing to network with other people in the industry — and even those outside of the industry — to get different perspectives

Start-Stop-Continue exercises can provide a balanced approach to discussing areas of improvement, areas of strength and areas of opportunity. These exercises can be implemented successfully in different groups within your business. As an owner or manager, if you haven't done a Start-Stop-Continue exercise, you may want to consider doing so, as it provides an introspective look at both you and your employees' actions and priorities.

If you would like assistance with conducting a Start-Stop-Continue workshop for your team, please contact your local Hubbard Feeds representative.