

THOSE SACRED COWS

by: M. Louise Walters, PhD ABD, MM, BS, IOM

‘Sacred Cows’ are programs / activities of some longevity and organizational history that are tough to ‘put out to pasture.’

Sacred Cows are those ‘cherished traditions and programs’ organizations keep around because “We’ve always done it that way” but are sorely outdated (even to the point of being out-of-step) with contemporary practices and thinking. Not to be confused with vibrant, vital programs, Sacred Cows are activities way past their prime that no one really wants to work on or chair. Sacred Cows are the groaners - the programs that produce internal whimpers when spotted on meeting agendas.

Usually you can spot a Sacred Cow right away.

Look at its performance over time:

Participation is dwindling.

Income is not covering expenses (or is revenue neutral, at best).

Interest has declined and, along with it, committee members.

A word to the wise: if you want to get rid of a Sacred Cow, don’t just start indiscriminately hacking away. Conduct a survey. Talk to people. Poll members. Ask what’s important and what’s not.

So, the idea (eliminate the program) is floated. Okay, but how? When? And most importantly, is there support -- do we know if others feel the same way? Or, do they ‘like the Sacred Cow just the way it is, thank you very much’? In which case, there may be more support than you anticipated for hanging on to the Sacred Cow.

What to do? What to do? Ask. There are three possible responses:

1. Keep ‘as is.’
2. Keep but make modifications.
3. Eliminate.

NOTE: See Committee Recommendation Form

Whatever path you choose, communicate every step of the way. Use your communication resources to reinforce overall value and ancillary benefit.

