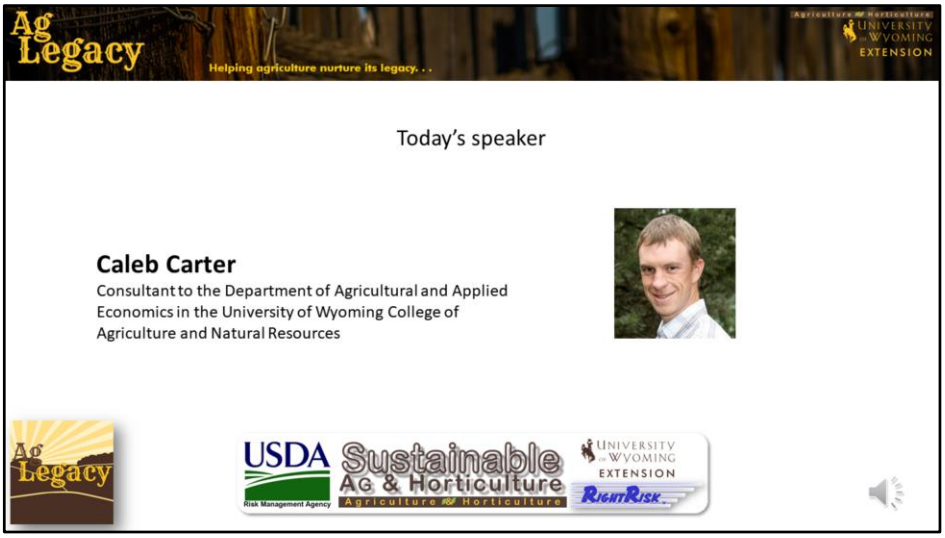
Welcome to another AG LEGACY recording.

AG LEGACY is a series of presentations and other online materials intended to assist rural families in creating their own legacy by beginning the thought process and opening the lines of communication.

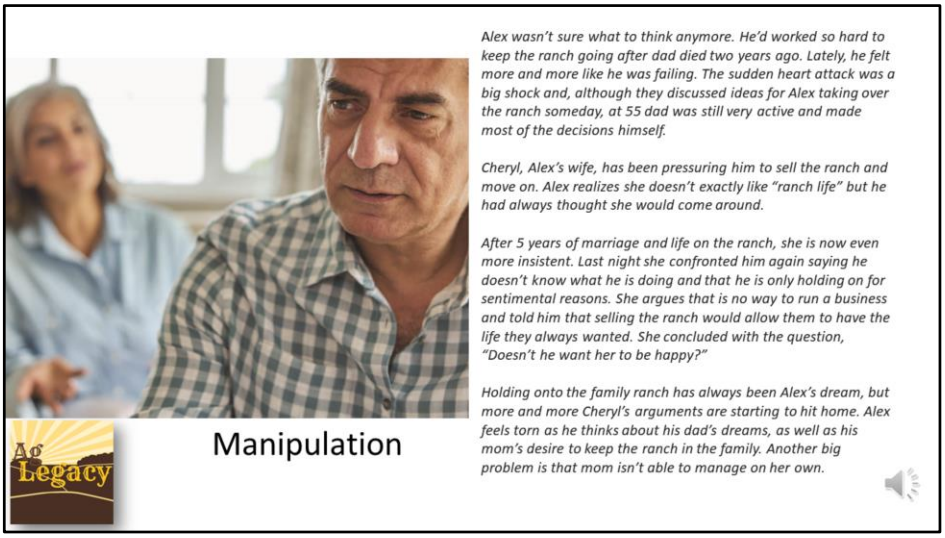
Today's recording will address the question "How Do you Keep Manipulation Out of Your Ag Legacy?"



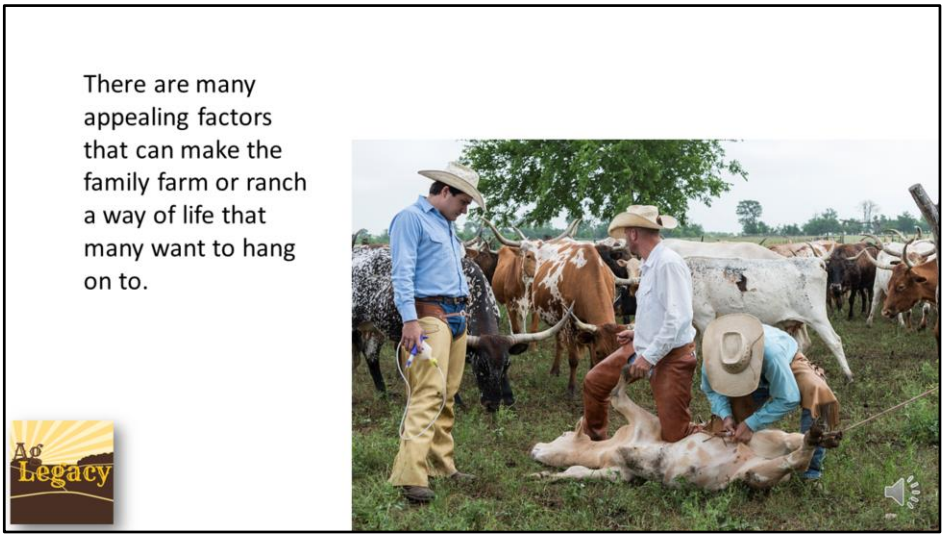
I'm Caleb Carter, consultant to the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics in the University of Wyoming College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

I will be your speaker for today's AG LEGACY presentation

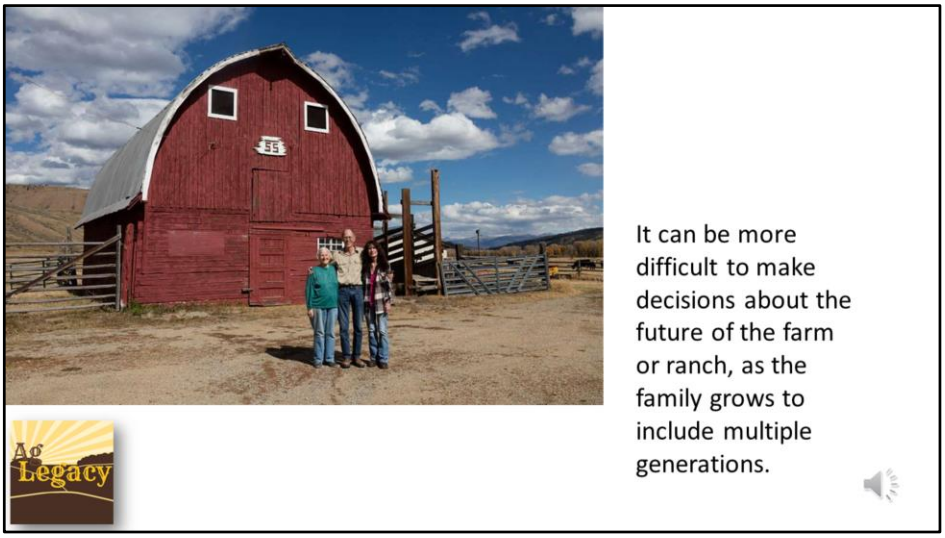
We all experience manipulation in many ways on a regular basis. And it is not all done with malicious intent. But when a person uses manipulation techniques to sway another person's beliefs or perceptions, it can become controlling and even abusive. Today we are going to discuss what manipulation is, how to identify it, and how to address it.



What should Alex do?
Should his feelings matter in this decision?

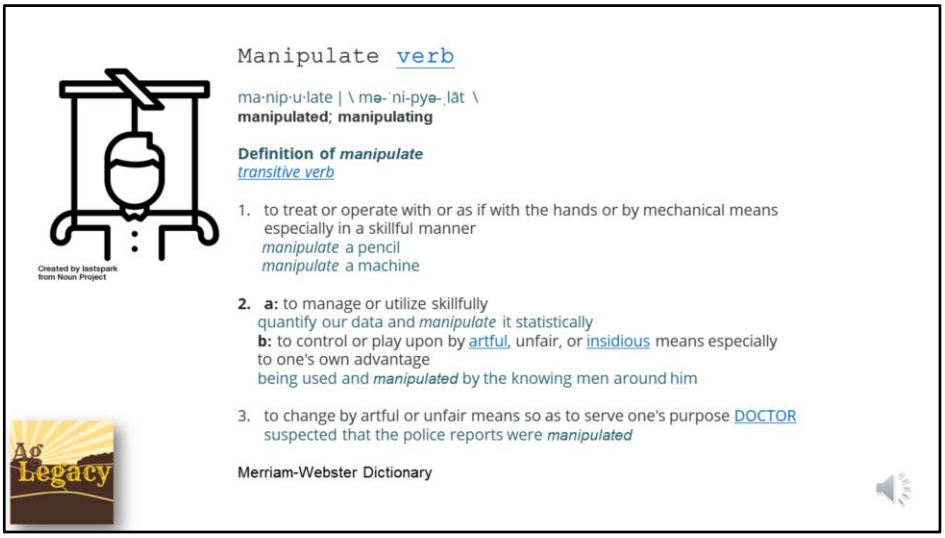


There are many appealing factors that can make the family farm or ranch a way of life that many want to hang on to. The opportunity to work together is an important component, as well as the freedom of working outside on your own land and making your own decisions.

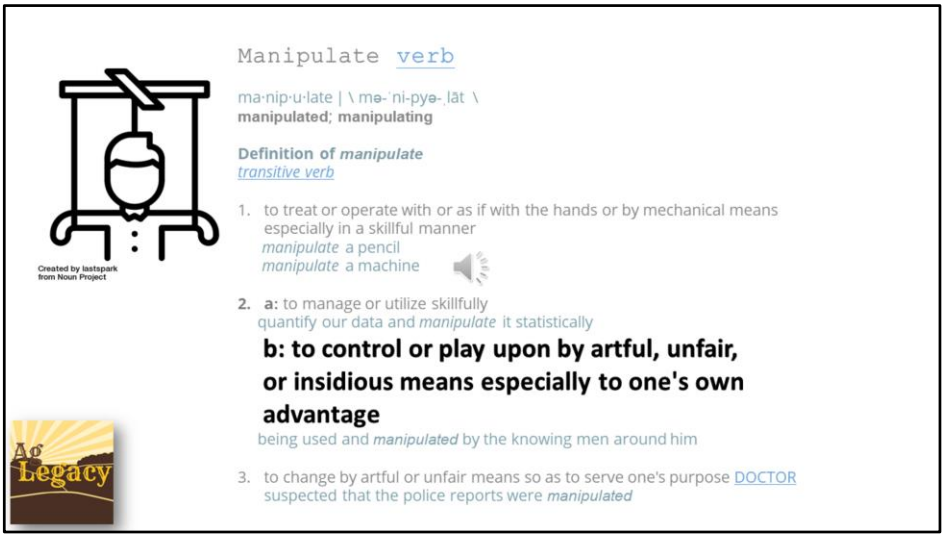


It can be more difficult to make decisions about the future of the farm or ranch, as the family grows to include multiple generations. This can also lead to disagreements, arguing, and hurt feelings.

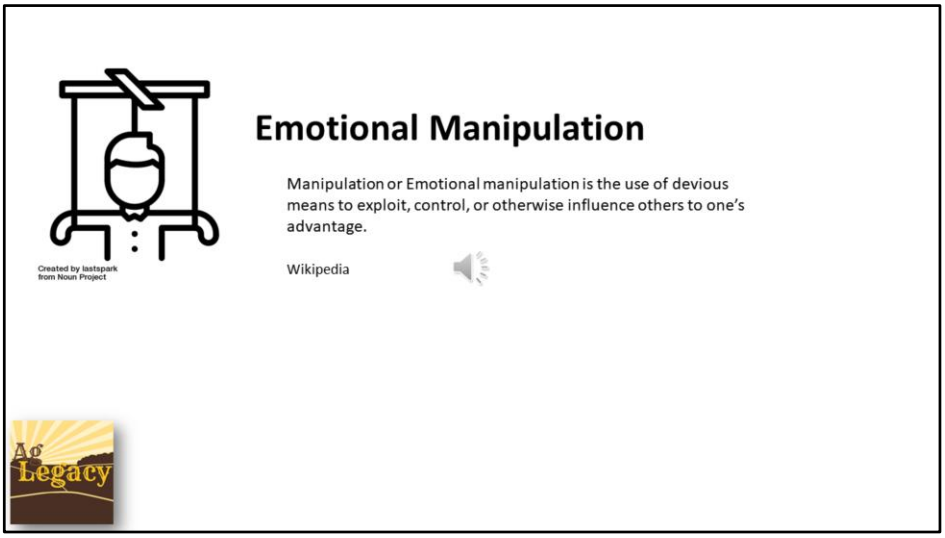
Those involved may get to a point where they have widely different views on the big decisions such as changes to the operation, how to transition the farm or ranch to the next generation, or if the family should just sell the operation. These situations may lead family members to attempt to manipulate others in an attempt to get their way.



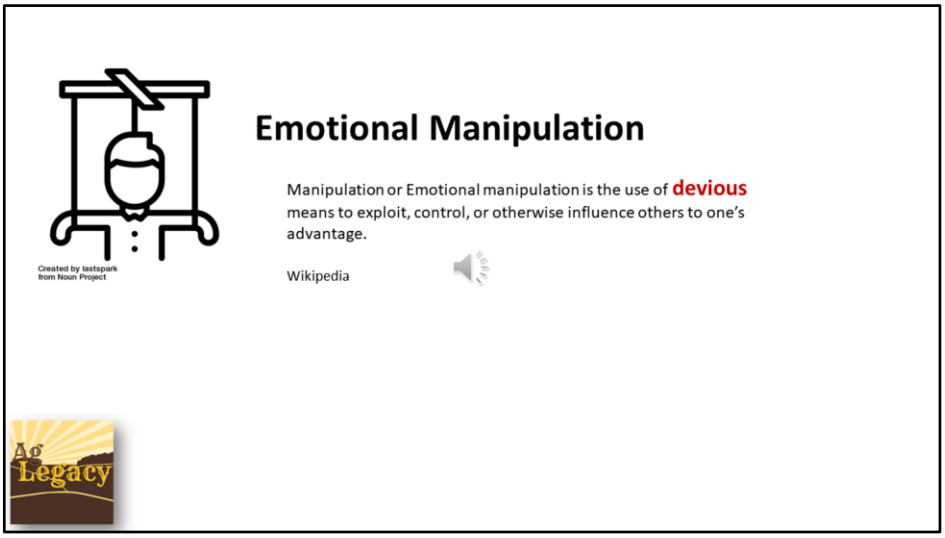
But before we get too far into this discussion, we should better define what we mean by manipulation. The term manipulate has many meanings. Merriam-Webster offers these definitions. Which one do you feel fits the best to describe manipulation in a family setting?



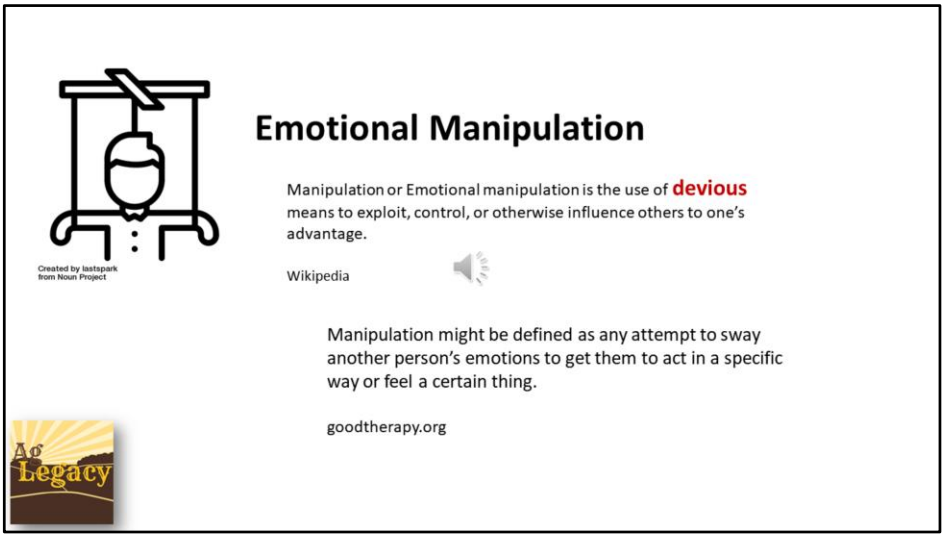
Definition 2b seems like a good fit. It touches on the fact that people who are trying to manipulate others often utilize “unfair” or “insidious” means to achieve something in their own favor. But it lacks that personal touch that makes it more real and brings it front and center for our discussion today.



The type of manipulation we are talking about is often referred to as emotional manipulation. Wikipedia offers a more personal definition. Manipulation or Emotional manipulation is the use of devious means to exploit, control, or otherwise influence others to one's advantage. It brings out the concept that someone who is attempting manipulation is using devious means and is seeking control.



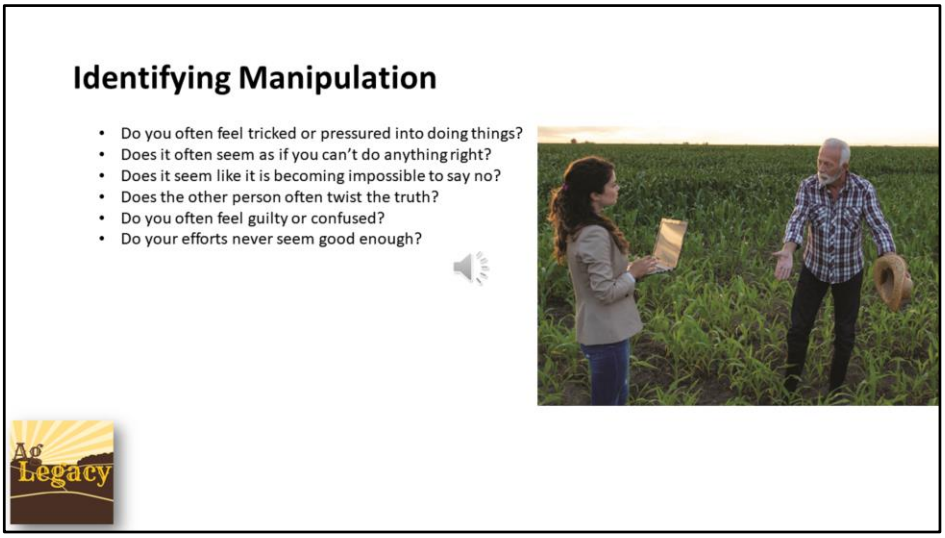
But I am concerned that the word devious might lead some people to separate themselves from the idea of manipulation. Maybe saying "I don't have devious intentions". It is important to note that, while it is typical that we would start any thought process about manipulation by immediately looking at the other person or persons, we can't overlook the fact that we might be guilty of attempting to manipulate others as well. But lets look at yet another definition that might help us narrow in even better.



In an article titled "Red Flags: Are You Being Emotionally Manipulated?" author Zawn Villines defines manipulation as any attempt to sway another person's emotions to get them to act in a specific way or feel a certain thing. This definition takes out the devious component and leaves us with a broader definition. One that I think is more relatable in the context we are discussing today, as well as life in general. When we think about this way, it is easy to identify the manipulation we experience on a daily basis. It is also more approachable I think to help us identify ways we might be manipulative ourselves. But it is important to remember that even if we don't think we have "devious" intentions, we need to realize the damaging effects manipulation can have on others.

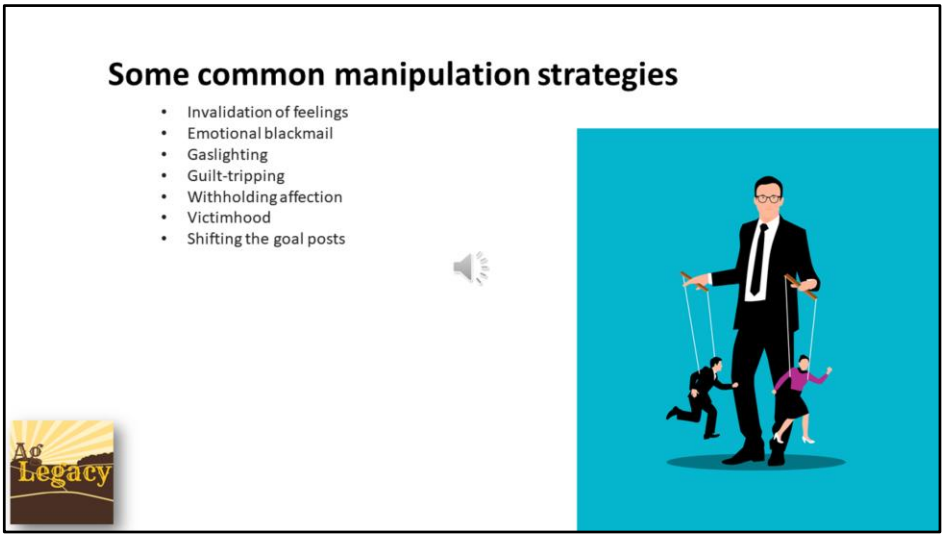
As I mentioned earlier, manipulation is very common. And not all manipulation necessarily has malicious intent behind it. For example, most sales ads are a form of manipulation, trying to get us to buy their product. The same could be said about political campaigns as they attempt to sway us towards their side of an issue.

However, anytime someone uses manipulation to sway another's feelings or convictions, it is not acceptable. It is easy for feelings to get heated and for people to be hurt when discussing many of the difficult topics that can go along with working together. Such as talking about money or decision-making power. This can be especially true when discussion turns to the transition of the farm/ranch from one generation to the next.



It can sometimes be difficult to identify if you are being manipulated, as it can be very subtle.

Some key identifiers of manipulation include positive answers to the following questions:



Though manipulation techniques can vary, they often follow some sort of pattern. Being able to identify these patterns can help you determine if someone is being manipulative. Some common manipulation techniques can include:

Let's look at these methods in more detail.

Invalidation of feelings. When someone is trying to manipulate another person, they might try to convince them that their feelings aren't important. They may do this by interrupting or talking over them, dismissing their concerns, or telling them how they should feel. As a person comes to believe their feelings aren't important, it can spill over into other relationships and make them more susceptible to further manipulation.

Emotional blackmail. This also plays off someone's feelings. The line follows a common pattern where the manipulator makes a demand and if the other person refuses, they will pressure them into giving in though flattery or threats. When the person complies, they reward with kindness and affection. This will often lead to further manipulation as the person becomes more susceptible to their tactics.

Gaslighting. This can occur when the aggressor attempts to convince someone that something didn't happen, such as an abuse or other negative experience. They attempt to distort another person's sense of reality, making them question their memory.

Guilt-tripping. Guilt isn't always malicious. Feeling guilty for something we did wrong can help motivate us to make amends or change behavior. However, when a person uses guilt to make another feel bad or do something they would rather not do, this is a form of manipulation.

Withholding affection. Giving someone the silent treatment or avoiding them altogether can be a form of manipulation when it is used as a way to punish someone or make them fearful.

Victimhood. People can also manipulate others by taking on the role of a victim. Blaming others for their difficulties and downplaying their own responsibility. Often turning situations around and blaming the other person.

Aggression or personal attacks. Manipulation can take a more direct approach through shaming, mocking, or intimidation. The person trying to manipulate may rationalize their actions by referring to it as tough love or asking the other person why they can't take a joke or telling them to stop being so sensitive.

Shifting the goal posts. Continually shifting the criteria that one must meet in order to please another is also a form of manipulation. It can leave the other person feeling like they are never good enough or don't deserve their respect.

The next natural question you might be asking yourself is “why would a person try to manipulate someone else”? And while you may have your own thoughts about people's motives behind their actions, it often comes back to a lack of good communication skills. Other reasons may include fear, it may be a defensive action or a way to avoid connection.

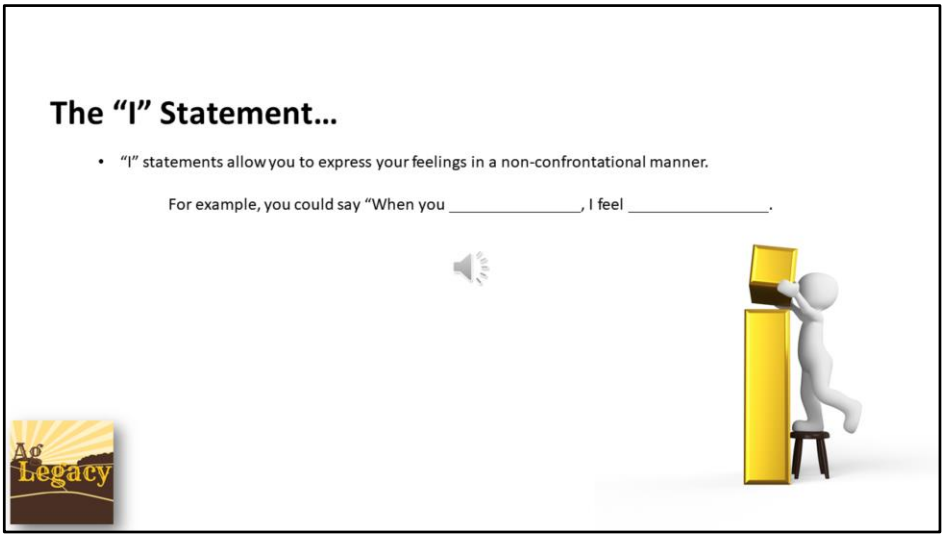
Let's expand on these and look at how these situations could lead someone to become manipulative.

So, reasons may not always be nefarious.

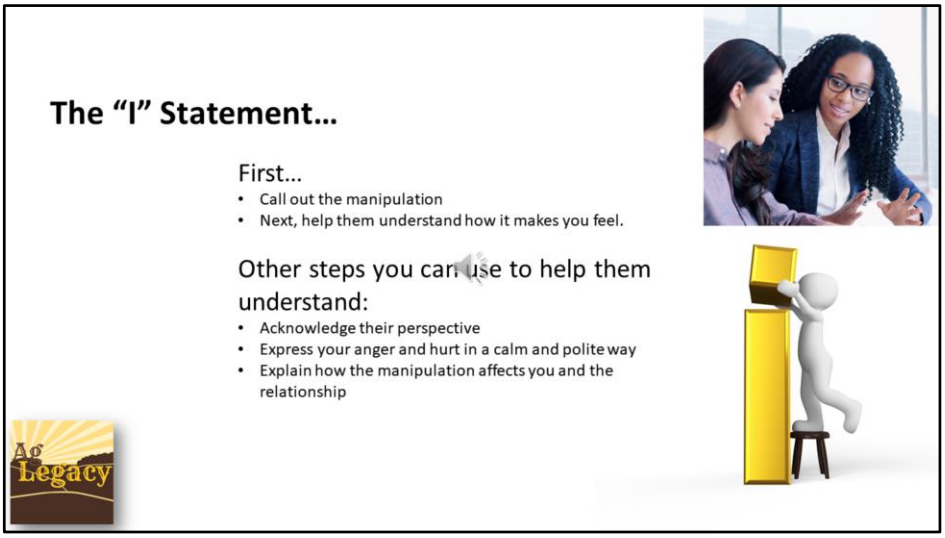
Now, let's change the pronoun from he/she or them/they, to me, myself, and I. What if you are the one being manipulative? How can you begin to determine if you are manipulating others in your relationships? Let's begin by discussing these potential identifying behaviors.

All of these are examples of behavior that could be considered manipulative. If you answered positively when considering these scenarios, you may be manipulating others in your relationships.

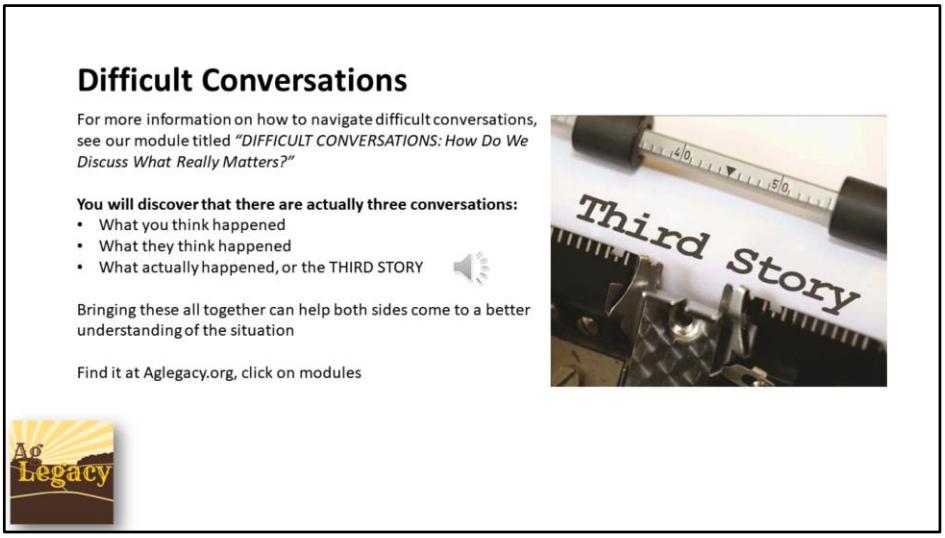
Ok, so you have identified that someone is attempting to manipulate you. How do you address this with the individual? Last time you tried to talk about it, things just blew up in your face and you got nowhere in the discussion. The person then immediately went on the defensive. While it is important to be firm and call out the manipulation, think back to the previous slide where we looked at some of the reasons people act manipulative. What is causing this person to act this way now? In calling out their actions, also try to understand their perspective on the situation. Focus on how their actions make you feel and how they affect your relationship.



To help you express your feelings in a non-confrontational manner you can use the infamous "I Statement". Using the "I Statement" can help you to express your feelings and convey how their actions are affecting you without putting them on the defensive. A simple "When you _____, I feel _____" can convey these emotions in a simplistic manner that they can't debate. Because you are not focusing on them, rather you are making it about you and how you feel when they do _____.

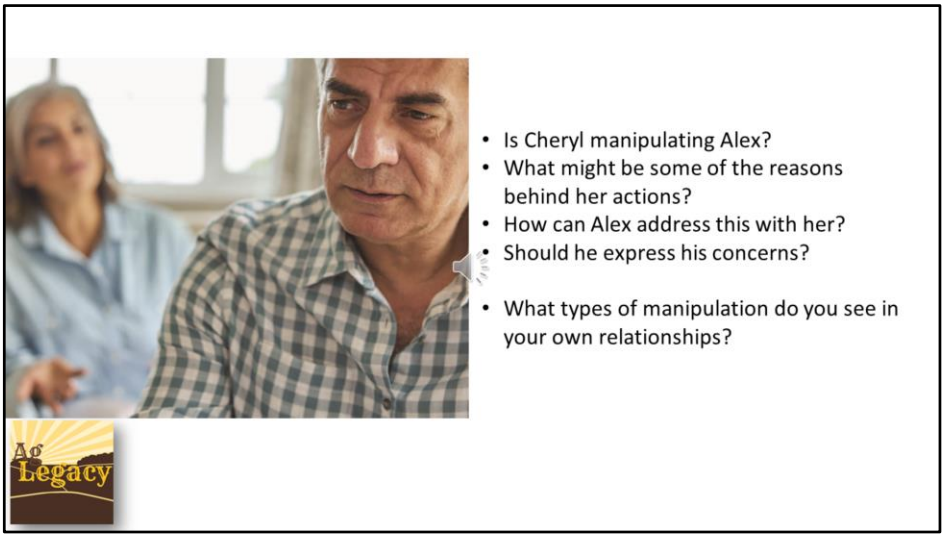


However you address it, be sure to include the other person in the conversation. Genuinely try to understand their perspective and listen. Taking time to listen and understand the other person can go a long way in diffusing a potentially difficult situation.



To learn more about how to navigate these difficult conversations, check out our module titled DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS: How Do We Discuss What Really Matters? You will find out how to combine your perspective of what happened with their perspective of what happened in order to get to the THIRD STORY, or what actually happened. Gaining a better understanding of where both sides are coming from can go a long way to curbing manipulation as both sides work together to be heard and understood together.

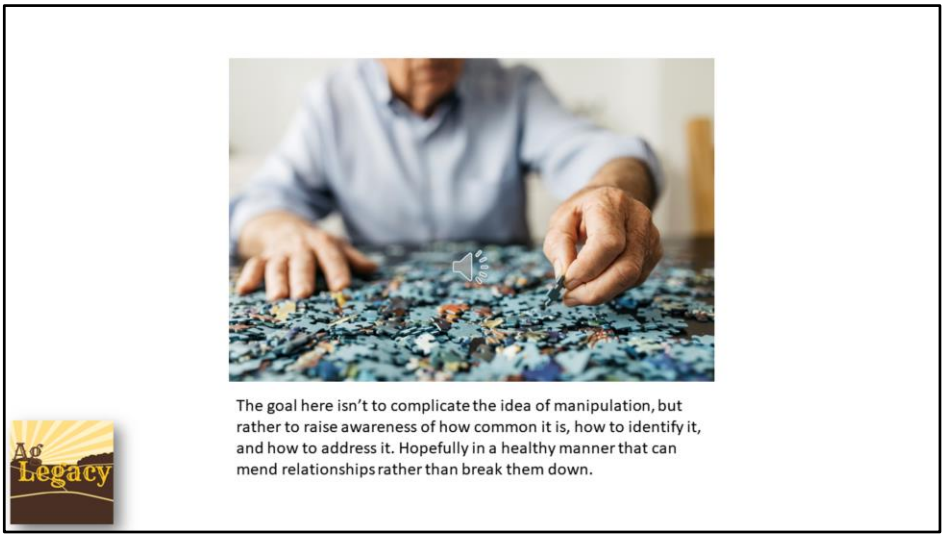
Working together on the family farm or ranch can be very rewarding but can also be a source of stress and frustration. Different thoughts about the best course of action, varying goals and long-term objectives, or a desire for control or to sway others to a different direction, or maybe push someone out can all lead someone to try to manipulate others. On the other hand, they might simply be feeling threatened or insecure and are unsure how else to respond. They may not even be conscious of what they are doing.



Let's revisit Alex and Cheryl. What do you think about their story in light of what we have discussed today?

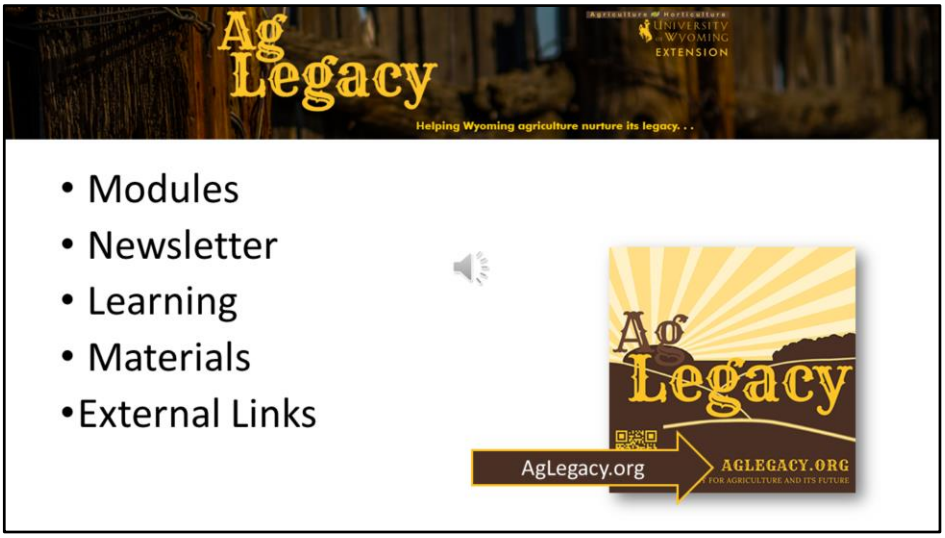
- Is Cheryl manipulating Alex?
- What might be some of the reasons behind her actions?
- How can Alex address this with her?
- Should he express his concerns?

- What types of manipulation do you see in your own relationships?



Now the goal here isn't to complicate the idea of manipulation, but rather to raise awareness of how common it is, how to identify it, and how to address it. Hopefully in a healthy manner that can mend relationships rather than break them down.

We hope that you have gained a better understanding of how to identify manipulation in your own relationships and maybe even in your own behavior.



If you have found this presentation helpful, we also recommend that you check out the newsletter on the same topic. You can find it on our website at Aglegacy.org. And while you are there, be sure to check out our other materials including modules, newsletters, and additional materials to help you create your own Ag legacy.

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Thank you!