

OUTSIDE THE BOX



by Tom Field, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

The code

“The seminal difference between successful companies and mediocre or unsuccessful ones has little, if anything, to do with what they know or how smart they are. It has everything to do with how healthy they are.”

— Patrick Lencioni

There is considerable evidence that our society is not in a state of healthfulness. Vitriolic behavior, “us vs. them” strategies designed to divide instead of unite, and carving every issue and discussion into either a state of belief or disbelief with no consideration for deep analysis characterizes the current state of our republic.

This condition is hardly a one-sided affair. No one gets a free pass, regardless of political position, socioeconomic status or any other demographic comparison. The problem is shared across our society,

and so must be the solution.

Working the problem requires that we revisit our national foundations and the advantage upon which the United States was created. Our citizens are joined by a unique bond; an idea made manifest through our constitution. We are bound by our belief in a set of aspirational values — a vision for how free men and women can best govern themselves.

At the very heart of our national character is the expectation that citizens live and conduct themselves honorably.

Honor

Honor is rarely discussed in contemporary society, perhaps because living by its code is difficult. Honor demands that individuals be accountable to standards of conduct and character that can only be obtained through discipline, maturity and the capacity to set short-term self-interests aside.

Honor is an act of intentionality. It cannot be forced upon a person, nor can it be attained through external reward. Rather, it is a set of personal choices driven by the desire to attain aspirational standards of conduct



that move an individual as close as possible to their highest and best state of existence. Honor is not a state of blind loyalty, nor a waiver of independent thought. However, it is an acknowledgement that integrity and character are deeply important to our society and recognizes the difference between right and wrong.

Honorable people are not perfect, but they are accountable and accept the consequences of their actions and decisions. To live with honor demands that we expand our perspective, relinquishing the short-term realm of convenience and self-gratification to focus on our highest aspirations in terms of our goals and the manner in which those goals are attained. Honorable people recognize the inherent problems in society, but remain steadfast in their principles as they work to overcome those challenges.

For example, I stand for “The Star Spangled Banner” and the presentation of our flag not because I am satisfied with the status quo, unwilling to acknowledge the problems and flaws that plague our nation, but rather because I believe our highest aspirations, defended in blood and sacrifice by so many, framed by the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution provide the best route to the solutions we seek.

None of us can lay claim to a state of perfection. We are flawed — an inescapable element of the human condition. However, honor’s call speaks to that deeply rooted force within us that aspires to living to our potential in service of a cause greater than ourselves. Ranching provides a dynamic canvas upon which to engage in the path toward an honorable life.

The ranch

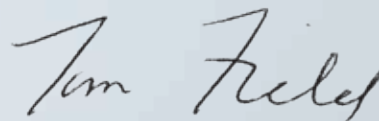
The ranch is a community of people, plants, animals, natural resources and enterprises complete with ever-evolving challenges where actions have consequences in both the short and the long term. Decisions and actions that violate any of the components of the ranch system weaken its ability to survive. Given the deeply entwined relationships among these components, failure to live, lead and manage honorably guarantees undesirable consequences in the future.

However, when honor is at the forefront, ranching becomes more than an economic activity. Living honorably improves relationships among people; builds community; and enhances financial, ecosystem, livestock and human performance over the long haul. The

multidimensional and dynamic nature of the ranching landscape provides a stage where character is built, challenged and revealed on a near-daily basis.

Honor is not an absolute condition in either ranching or society. However, it is available to all who make the conscious decision to affirm that it is indeed central to our individual and collective health. A culture, community, family or enterprise that chooses instant gratification over long-term wealth creation, values winning at any cost, and embraces division more warmly than unity will ultimately crumble.

The path to living with honor is not one of ease. Instead it is a mighty and daily struggle to lift up the best of our shared ideals. However, as Samuel Smiles reminds us, “If there were no difficulties, there would be no success; if there were nothing to struggle for, there would be nothing to be achieved.”



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