

# OUTSIDE THE BOX

by Tom Field, University of Nebraska – Lincoln

## The Power of Choice

*Learning how to handle the future from past experiences.*

The events of the past seven months have left many of us shaking our heads in disbelief and asking ourselves, “What’s next?” Perhaps to look forward, we need to first study the past.

When 56 signatures were affixed to the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the course of history experienced a tectonic shift, but there was a price to be paid by those who “pledged their lives, fortunes and sacred honor.” Five were captured by the British; nine were killed during the ensuing conflict; four had sons either killed or captured in the Revolutionary War; 12 had their homes burned to the ground; and the families of many were harassed, jailed, or forced into hiding. While some rebuilt their prosperity following the war, others died penniless.

Those who stepped forward to sign the Declaration were thoughtful, soft-spoken, well-educated and comparatively well-to-do. They understood full well the stakes, and the consequences they would face. They had something to lose. Yet they stepped forward and signed to cement their commitment to liberty, to demonstrate their honorable aspiration that citizens were capable of governing themselves and to make clear that they would no longer subjugate themselves to the monarchy.

Theirs was no shallow demonstration. John Adams would write to all future citizens of the Republic, “You will never know how much it has cost my generation to preserve your freedom. I hope you will make good use of it.”

So what will we do with that freedom won by the courage of the founders, defended and repurchased with the sacrifice of ordinary citizens over the course of our national history? While not without flaws and faults, our country offers an opportunity to live out our talents and gifts in accordance with the “unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Such an opportunity should not be left to chance. Faced with the uncertainty of these times, it is appropriate to take action based on two eternal lessons from the signers:

- Do not shrink because of fear.
- Reject the scarcity mindset.

We have the capacity to exert significant influence on answering what’s next. The first step is to create and embrace an aspirational vision to define a future worthy of the sacrifice of the pathfinders who came before that creates equal or greater opportunity for the generations who will follow. Never ignoring the pressing and grave challenges of these times; now is the time for a bold vision. Throughout history the

difference-makers were people who when asked what they would have done differently replied — “dream bigger and start earlier.”

In their work, *The 7 Mindsets*, Scott Shickler and Jeff Waller advocate that vision must be followed by a deep commitment to personal accountability, an attitude of gratitude and a commitment to invest sweat equity to serve others.

Faced with the decision to settle for the status quo or to pursue a greater purpose, the founders played to win and so must we. Rest assured, winning is a difficult proposition. Winning demands clarity of focus, sacrifice, a burning desire to create and build value, and the willingness to make tough choices. Success also demands the rejection of scarcity thinking.

Abundance thinking allows its practitioners to see possibility where others see limits and to proactively uncover solutions while others yield to frustration. Liberty is born from abundance while the quest for power results from a mindset of scarcity. We have the capacity to choose, and the sum of our choices will determine whether we have made good use of the freedom afforded us by the sacrifices of previous generations. **AJ**

*Editor’s note: Tom Field is a rancher from Parlin, Colo., and the director of the Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln.*