

OUTSIDE THE BOX

by Tom Field, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

The Stockman's Code

The Cowboy Code has been around for many years, but it has the ability to help us get back on the pathway to success during the pandemic.

There are remarkable differences between the realities of work and craft, existence and life, chaos and code. Ranching provides an environment in which to experience and consider the variation between these concepts.

An activity as simple as gathering yearlings from a pasture can be accomplished in a multitude of manners. The first involves a lot of noise, stress, lost time and damaged fence. However, using the principles of stockmanship, those same cattle can be gathered quietly, artfully, and in such a manner the remainder of the day is staged for success. Once the latter has been experienced, it is unfathomable the former would ever again be an accepted approach.

Why then does poor stockmanship

persist in some corners of the industry?

On a more macro scale, 2020 has provided an unusual backdrop to experience the shifting moments of consternation and conviction, frustration and faith, despair and gratitude. We find ourselves in search of answers, probing the darkness in pursuit of light.

My conclusion is our malaise can be traced to a failure to create and live by the virtues of an intentional and forward-looking code — a set of aspirational guidelines and philosophies that unite us into community. Fundamentally, a code is not associated with a dream, but instead with aspirations — dreams driven by sweat, dedicated effort and a commitment to excellence.

Throughout history, humans have endeavored to live the power and meaning of a code. Consider the Bushidō Code that guides the behavior of the Samurai, in which eight virtues provide the foundation for a meaningful and fulfilling life. Compare these to the tenets of the Cowboy Code.

Sound stockmanship is inextricably tied to the foundations of conduct as framed by the Samurai and cowboy cultures. In particular, the virtues of respect, compassion and self-control are required to lift our work to the level of the craftsman.

- Respect for the profession leads us to continuous improvement, a commitment to ongoing learning and assurance we have effectively trained the people

Bushido Code

Honor
Compassion
Justice
Loyalty
Respect
Integrity
Self-control
Courage

Keep your promises; tell the truth;
finish what you start

Be considerate of others; be gentle
with livestock, children and the elderly;
never pass someone on the trail without
saying "howdy"

Help those in distress; never take unfair
advantage; do not advocate or possess
racially or religiously intolerant ideas

Ride for the brand

Cowboy Code

Respect land, nature, other people, the
law, your community and the nation

Remember some things are not for sale;
take pride in your work

Talk less and say more; remain clean
in thought, speech, action and habits;
know where to draw the line

Live each day with courage; do what
has to be done; be tough but fair

Assembled from several published versions

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in our organization who will implement the principles of stockmanship in their work.

- Practicing compassion for the livestock and people under our care is the very heart of why we implement stockmanship. Compassion allows us to apply the appropriate level of pressure, understand and utilize inherent tendencies and behaviors; and it inspires us to create better facilities and processes.
- Finally, self-control is the

critical ingredient for effective stockmanship. When we act from a place of anger, frustration or distraction, the outcomes are seldom favorable and never sustainable. Only when we are able to harness our own emotions and actions are we able to truly enhance the quality of life for ourselves, the people around us, and the creatures both great and small for whom we have responsibility.

These codes developed through

time, place and culture, but they ring with a central truth. To live a code of excellence founded on the virtues of honor, compassion, integrity, courage, self-control, loyalty and respect beckons us toward a life of abundance, both as stockmen and human beings. The question is, do we have the wisdom to answer the call? **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.

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