



Outside the Box

► by **Tom Field**, director of producer education, National Cattlemen's Beef Association

Summer reading

The downside of having grandmothers who had spent their early professional lives as schoolteachers was that they knew most, if not all, of the shenanigans and tall tales that elementary school boys can perpetrate. They, along with my mother, encouraged reading as an excellent substitute for mischief. Our remote locale, marginal television reception and access to my mother's always growing collection of books provided the environment in which reading became a passion instead of an assignment.

Change of perspective

Even in the age of instantaneous communication, books provide the means to explore a world of places, people, stories and ideas. More importantly, reading seems to help solve problems — and the solutions often come from the most unexpected sources and authors. At the risk of presumption, let me share a brief overview of some of my recent favorites — each in its own way has helped me better understand and even solve problems in my profession, on our ranch and in my family life.

Regardless of one's political affiliation, it seems that most of us are no less frustrated with government and leadership than we were a year or even five years ago. A common theme seems to be “where have the leaders gone?”

Increasingly social scientists and business researchers are suggesting that our challenge lies in society's mistaken notion that charismatic people with ‘star power’ are our most effective leaders. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Great leadership is founded on a set of central principles that can be learned, applied and perfected by nearly anyone who has the desire and dedication.

John C. Maxwell's *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* provides insight into the fundamental truths concerning leadership. Maxwell's 21 laws offer each of us the tools to move beyond frustrated bystander and into the realm of leadership where our efforts can make a difference in families, businesses, organizations and communities.

Mavericks

Mavericks at Work by W.C. Taylor and Polly LaBarre offers examples and insights of businesses that, when faced with “death by doing the same old thing,” found the courage to step outside of conventional thinking as a means to reignite the dying embers of a stagnant enterprise.

Perhaps my favorite story is that of Rob McEwen, former chief executive officer (CEO) of the Canadian mining company Goldcorp Inc. The problem that McEwen faced, as he described it, was that “gold mining is an old industry, a tired industry. The pace of change is glacial. Traditionally, mining companies have worried how strong your back is, not how big your brain is. We wanted to do something that no one in the industry had done, to tap into the intellectual capital of the whole world.”

After finding significant potential for increased production for a series of exploratory drill sites at a marginally producing Canadian gold mine, McEwen became increasingly frustrated by the lack of creativity coming from his team in determining how to pursue the leads that had originated from the exploratory drilling.

After a year of limited progress, to take his mind off the frustration, he attended a CEO executive training course dealing with emerging information technologies. As he listened to the advances created by open-source software programming that involved ‘volunteer’ talent from a diverse set of geographic and professional sources with no formal structure, he became intrigued. When he learned about the number of new

companies, value enhancement strategies, and profit centers that were freshly created by this community approach to problem solving, he knew that he, too, had to find ways to get the best talent in the world to work with him, knowing that he couldn't find, much less hire them all.

McEwen went home and invited geologists, scientists and engineers to tackle Goldcorp's problem. He went so far as to post 50 years of data from the mine onto the Internet so that those who accepted his invitation would have the same information as if they worked for him. To prove he was serious, McEwen put one-half million dollars up to be split by the 25 finalists and 3 finalists whose proposals were judged to be most worthy by a panel of international experts.

His invitation attracted 1,400 valid inquiries from more than 100 countries to download the data, and, of those, almost 150 submitted detailed drilling plans based on the information that Goldcorp had provided. More than half of the plans and sites were unique to the plans created by the internal team and have resulted in significant finds for the company. His creativity attracted both conventional and innovative thinking and created far more profit opportunities than could have originated from an internal process.

Lone survivor

My final suggestion is truly a must read. *Lone Survivor* is the story of Navy Seal Team 10 written by Marcus Luttrell. Far more than a book about the fight against terrorism, Luttrell's message serves as hope and inspiration for America as we face the chaos, the uncertainty and the pain of our current economic and political situation. This is a story of community, discipline, honor and courage that you should read and then give to your children and grandchildren. Within its chapters, I found perspective and hope while giving thanks for the remarkable men and women who defend our right to read, think and discuss both problems and solutions.

E-MAIL: tfield@beef.org

Editor's Note: Tom Field is a rancher from Parlin, Colo., and executive director of producer education for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

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