



Outside the Box

► by **Tom Field**, professor of animal science, Colorado State University

Aim high

Years ago, on my first journey overseas I asked an Australian friend to describe his biggest concern. His response was, "Too many people are falling into the belief that the government will fix their problems." I remember thinking at the time that such a concern would never describe life in the United States. Yet today it would be amongst my gravest worries about the future of our nation.

Rights and responsibilities

President Lincoln understood the danger of excessive dependence on governmental initiatives when he stated, "You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves." We seem to forget that the freedom equation has two important factors in its formulation — rights and responsibilities. Freedom only works when people are willing to accept responsibility as a precursor to the benefits of our individual and collective rights.

Achievement is the result of human creativity and willpower at work in an environment characterized by the freedom to act while accepting the consequences of those actions. Ernest Hemingway wrote that we should, "never mistake motion for action." It is easy to get trapped into investing a tremendous amount of energy into generating motion without any resulting actionable result. Motion, while time-consuming, fails to generate progress because it is conducted without much risk.

Action, on the other hand, is risky business. Business leader Peter Drucker says that, "Whenever anything is being accomplished, it is being done by a monomaniac with a mission."

I am not so naïve as to believe that the individual can attain his or her potential solely on the power of singular effort. Families, partnerships, teams, associations and communities are unique human organizations that allow us to function at higher levels of performance. These structures work because they are based on accountability, expectations and sincere commitment to those with whom we have freely entered into a relationship. At their very core, these organizations work because there are consequences. Lincoln and my Australian friend both understood that

the removal of responsibility from our lives dooms us to the steady and sure loss of freedom. The core of our democracy is not the guarantee of success but the opportunity to strive, to struggle and to work toward the attainment of our goals.

The necessity of struggle

As long as I can remember, the Olympic Games have captured my imagination and emotion. Perhaps it is the opportunity to cheer for the athletes of my beloved nation coupled with the privilege of observing human beings giving their all in pursuit of a dream that draws me to late nights filled with sports I only partially understand.

At the root of my fascination is the reality that for these athletes there are consequences, risks and opportunity at work. There are achievements measured in medals and in personal fulfillment, human disappointments tempered by the knowledge of having given their best, and always reminders that excellence only occurs when people demonstrate responsibility and accountability for their actions.

Michael Phelps will long be remembered as the winner of eight gold medals in Beijing and a young man who framed his success with a combination of significant personal sacrifices in preparing to pursue goals that most would have considered foolish. But I will always remember his words at the conclusion of the final relay as he hugged his teammates and told them that his achievement couldn't have been done without their contributions. For me his most memorable win came in the

4×100 relay when Jason Lezak overcame a seemingly insurmountable lead by the French team to claim victory.

What went through his head in the final 50 meters that allowed one of the oldest swimmers in the competition to beat his personal best time by nearly 1.5 seconds?

"I'm not going to lie," Lezak said. "When I flipped at the wall I thought, 'There's no way.' Then in the next instant, I was like 'No, this is the Olympics. I'm not giving up.' I got a super charge and just took it from there."

There's something important to be learned from the Olympic spirit for those of us who choose to participate in the realm of free enterprise where nothing is certain and guarantees are few and far between. That lesson lies in having the faith to accept that freedom is fraught with challenge and struggle and that the effort and risk in the end are what defines our

existence and makes us whole.

The necessity of struggle stands in stark contrast to the many messages of convenience and instant gratification, which seem to characterize contemporary life. But we should not be afraid of the challenge.

The late Ronald Reagan said it best when he stated, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free."

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