



Outside the Box

► by **Tom Field**, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Halftime adjustments

Monday mornings, quarterbacks love to talk about halftime adjustments. Tune in to any sports broadcast and there will likely be some reference to the ability of great coaches to shift the plan to adapt to the competition, weather, and other game-day conditions to capture momentum and assure a favorable outcome for their team. The need for midstream pivots in strategy reveal a conundrum for individuals, as well as organizations. Planning is central to effective execution, but winning depends on flexibility, nimble adjustments and the ability to deal with situational reality.

Flexibility and strategy

The process of making halftime adjustments is applicable far beyond the realm of athletics. In fact, most successful people, companies and institutions are adept at dealing with rapidly changing conditions largely because they understand the opportunities presented during halftime.

Halftime requires stoppage of the game, stepping off the playing field, and pausing to reflect and reassess. Leaders must have the discipline and vision to establish an effective halftime environment while assuring that good information is available to facilitate meaningful evaluation. While the process holds some level of similarity for both individuals and organizations, it will be useful to address each separately.

The individual

A former colleague of mine scheduled a four- to five-hour block twice a year designed to allow an intense focus on goals, values, outcomes, relationships and personal behavior. A written personal manifesto that outlined his vision, mission and values served as a critical resource to connect him to his deepest and most meaningful goals, core principles and desired impacts.

He also collected feedback from key people in his life — family, employees, trusted advisors and business partners. All feedback, positive and critical, was valued and weighed against his personal vision statement. Consideration was given to strengths, shortcomings and changes that were required to enhance the quality of his impact. The process was driven by a deep awareness that appropriate changes in style and personality were possible and sometimes required.

Staying focused on core strengths was at the very heart of the effort, but developing

an awareness and action plan as to the blind spots that might disrupt effective relationships was also important. Goals in both the short and long term were developed and progress toward them was measured.

Areas where coaching or additional education was necessary were acknowledged and steps taken to close the gaps. Finally, his reflections and insights were shared with an inner circle of the most trusted people in his life. As a result of using halftime to maximum effectiveness, his impact both professionally and personally was phenomenal.

To be honest, such an approach requires discipline and serious effort. The process, while inwardly focused, is not self-serving, as the goal is to develop individual capacity to better serve others and to be more effective in leadership and team roles.

However, it takes courage to take an honest look at the situation and to be accountable for taking the initiative to move in a new direction. To discard ineffective habits, behaviors and protocols is certainly uncomfortable work. However, there is lasting value to be created from the effort as it will transform people and their relationships.

The organization

Historically high markets have injected an amazing amount of cash flow into beef cattle enterprises, and with as much excitement as this creates, there is an undertone of danger. Current market prices are not sustainable for

the long haul, so business decisions should not be based on an assumption that a long-term price run is guaranteed.

Nonetheless, beef enterprises currently play a winning hand and have momentum in their favor. I would argue that scheduling a halftime has never been more important to assuring the health and well-being of businesses and organizations. A thoughtful

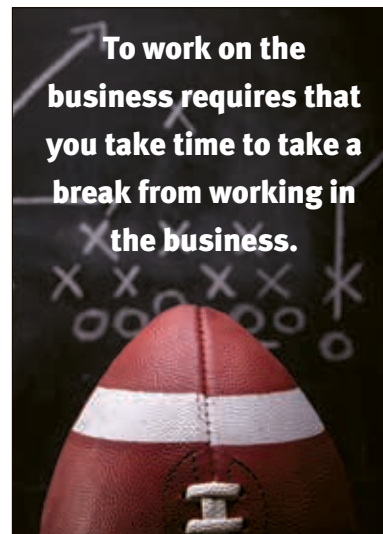
and structured evaluation of business goals, performance, opportunities and threats is critical to creating a strategic path that prepares the organization for success in the future.

Remember halftime rules are that the game stops and the players leave the field of play for a set period of time. It is impossible to effectively assess the direction and performance of the organization while

you are stacking hay, building fence, sorting calves or setting irrigation pipe.

To work on the business requires that you take time to take a break from working in the business. Strategy development, evaluation, reflection and adjusting the game plan require the full attention of leaders and key team members with a specific time frame established.

Just as a head coach evaluates stats from the first half and seeks input from assistant coaches during halftime, so should those leading enterprises and organizations. Decisions guided by good information and the input of a trusted inner circle are far more likely to yield desirable outcomes. Regardless of the score at present, use halftime to your greatest advantage.



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