



Outside the Box

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

Cowboys and designers

*I have a confession to make. My wife subscribes to a magazine titled *Real Simple* and, yes, I read it. The stated mission of the publication is “to provide smart, realistic solutions to everyday challenges, all to make life easier.” It is a publication highlighting a collection of ideas, products and services that are exceptionally well-designed.*

My first glance into the world of design came from interacting with and learning from Temple Grandin as she translated better cattle handling through pictures and images. However, it was a presentation by a mechanical engineer named Shane Farritor that convinced me that design, creativity and innovation extend far beyond the world of structures.

Embrace the right brain

My day-to-day interactions are with entrepreneurs, designers and restless souls who believe the status quo isn't good enough. Collectively, they have solidified my interest in the right side of the brain and led me to the world of Daniel Pink. In his book, *A Whole New Mind*, Pink makes the case that while our left brain — the side that thrives on information, logic, analysis — was responsible for the economic engine known as the information age; the future will belong to those who can blend the functionality of the left brain with the aesthetic- and design-focused right side. Pink points to six high-sensory abilities that will define the future — design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meaning. Is it possible that those same six attributes are the keys to success for cattle breeders, ranchers and the beef industry?

Consider the core of each of the six elements:

- Design — the beauty of functionality
- Story — finding the why
- Symphony — connecting the dots and finding the patterns
- Empathy — being able to walk in another person's shoes
- Play — inviting joy into the world of work
- Meaning — living in alignment with purpose and intent

The greatest design flaw for the beef industry is the presentation of the product at the retail case. While functional, the retail beef case does not invite the customer, much less mesmerize them. It is ironic that every major beef industry trade show is filled with design elements, while a visit to the



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average beef retail case is akin to a trip down generic lane. The best place to connect with consumers is the retail store, and the beef industry has chosen to stick with a 1980s approach; nothing but lost opportunity.

My tirade aside, what are your missed design opportunities — fences, sale-book format or grazing systems?

Daniel Pink points out that while different cultures may have vastly different approaches to economics, diet, education, social interaction and the like, they all share a common practice — storytelling. I find myself doing more and more business with people and organizations in part because I connect to their story. This is hardly breaking news. How many boxes of fruit or cookies are purchased because people connect to the story of FFA or the Girl Scouts? My guess is that most of those sales are driven by the story!

Great symphonies are a collection of intricate patterns, as are business relationships, systems management and cattle breeding. Applying the principles

of genetic selection to create an elite herd shares many of the same creative principles applied by masters such as Mozart and Beethoven. Applying the symphonic context to organizations offers a valuable perspective: Not only do we write the musical score, but to deliver its full value, a group of musicians playing disparate instruments must collaboratively flex their creative muscles.

Empathy is the core of building highly functional teams and exceptional customer

loyalty. Empathy is about listening, anticipating human needs, and understanding the consequences of decisions and processes on people. Great teams are never built on skill alone; they must share a deeper connection that allows them to perform even when the chips are down. Long-term effective leadership rises from the capacity to understand human beings.

The value of play to business and life rests in the answer to this question: Does your business and your life bring joy to others? Any answer other than yes suggests it might be time to reconnect to the value of play. As Brian Sutton-Smith

points out, “The opposite of play is not work, but depression.”

The final attribute — discovering meaning and living purposefully in its pursuit — is an element that will set apart the winners of the future. It is no longer enough to just be about what we do; acknowledging the how and the why offers a path beyond self to leverage our strengths and talents in the wholehearted service of a greater purpose.

If any of these points resonate with you, consider reading *A Whole New Mind* by Daniel Pink or visiting Shane Farritor's webpage at www.shanefarritor.com. It might just invigorate you and your business!

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