

# OUTSIDE THE BOX

## Tools and success

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A design team at Stanford was working on the problem of how to reengineer the lids on medicine

bottles so elderly people with arthritis and loss of power in their hands could more easily access their daily prescriptions. Success, in this case, was defined as removing the lid easily while retaining the safety elements of the original design.

As part of the process, the team conducted interviews with people representative of their target market. One 80-year-old woman with withered hands exclaimed that she had no trouble whatsoever opening her prescription bottles. This was a bit of a surprise to the team, so they asked if they could visit her home and observe how she manipulated the lids. The next day they stood in her kitchen and watched her cheerfully take an electric meat slicer and easily cleave the lid from each bottle.

The tool was not the key to her success; instead, it was her creativity to use a work-around approach to solve the problem. Tools without the creativity and skill of the user are not solutions. In fact, too much dependence on a particular tool erodes success when technological, societal or marketplace shifts occur.

The Pony Express, Detroit's automobile industry, Kodak and many other business entities struggled to shift their business model when confronted with change. Certainly tools are relevant and the resources invested into improving them create value.

**TOOLS TO  
CREATIVITY  
SUCCEED**

However, we must not make the mistake of valuing the tool more than the imagination and humanity of the user. While tools enhance success, they are ultimately not its source.

### What is success?

Perhaps it would be useful to pause and consider the context of success. Defining success is one of the great challenges given the multidimensional nature of life, community, enterprise and the individual. While it would be easier to view success as a predefined quantifiable outcome, such an approach diminishes the richness of our existence and fails to recognize the wonder, lessons and worthy insights obtained from viewing success as a journey. It's a path discovered rather than followed.

Assuming that we accept success as a multidimensional process influenced and informed by our desire for truth, we can accept that success results not from tools, but rather from attitudes and habits.

Evidence of the effectiveness of these habits and attitudes may be found in every walk of life, but I am most inspired by the way they are practiced by blue-collar professionals and seemingly ordinary men and women.

Consider the power of the following in your pursuit of success:

**1. Show up!** There is no substitute for the disciplined and consistent ability to show up, to be accountable and to accept responsibility. This habit is perhaps the very foundation upon which success in all facets of life is constructed.

**2. Pursue virtue!** In the grand scheme, merit and accomplishment are not measured in what we do. What matters far more is how we



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accomplish the work and, even more importantly, why. The application of courage, generosity, wisdom, humility, temperance, justice and honesty to personal and professional life provides the guideposts for lasting success.

**3. Open both eyes!** Not long ago, my young daughter was at her annual eye exam and, as is her manner, she was concentrating on each task with diligence. She had been holding the small shield over one eye while reading the rows of letters. When the doctor asked her to cover the other eye, she did so

diligently. When he asked her to once again read the display of letters, she responded, "I can't see any!" In her concentration, she had forgotten to open the uncovered eye.

Sustained success requires having both eyes wide open so as to better understand problems, opportunities, systems and people. Furthermore, those with open minds and hearts are far more capable of generating lasting value and effects. |

Editor's note: In "Outside the Box," a regular, separate column in both the *Angus Journal*® and the *Angus Beef Bulletin*, author Tom Field shares his experience as a cattleman and his insightful perspective on the business aspects of ranching. Field is director of the Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where he holds the Paul Engler Chair of Agribusiness Entrepreneurship.