

OUTSIDE THE BOX

by Tom Field, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Build With Character

We are designed to create; the cornerstone upon which all progress rests are the power of the human spirit guided by true north principles.

Our most important duty is to build the next generation of leaders, innovators and citizens. To do so, we must break free from the cultural trends of convenience without investment, affirmation without accountability, conformance without question, indoctrination instead of discovery and safety rather than liberty.

Statesman Winston Churchill made clear the path when he stated, “All the great things are simple; many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, honor, duty, mercy, hope.”

These simple truths are the pillars upon which a healthy society is constructed. Yet, these principles are insufficiently exemplified and, in too many cases, marginalized.

The meaningful journey has never been one of ease, nor without guideposts, sacrifice, and the expenditure of great effort. Consider the following: “You will never do anything in this world without courage. It is the greatest quality of the mind next to honor.” — Aristotle

“A soft, easy life is not worth living, if it impairs the fiber of brain and heart and muscle. We must dare to be great; and we must realize that greatness is the fruit of toil and sacrifice and high courage ... For us is the life of action, of strenuous performance of duty; let us live in the harness, striving mightily; let us rather

run the risk of wearing out than rusting out.” — Theodore Roosevelt

“The battle of life is, in most cases, fought uphill; and to win it without a struggle were perhaps to win it without honor. If there were no difficulties, there would be no success; if there were nothing to struggle for, there would be nothing to be achieved.” — Samuel Smiles

To pursue excellence is embedded in the very nature of humankind, and the United States is the very best soil from which those qualities can take root, grow and bloom. However, great outcomes are not born of hope alone, but rather dedicated and focused effort. Courage, industry, resolve, self-reliance, discipline and honor are the virtues that must once again become the foundation.

Consider young men, in particular, must be encouraged and mentored to develop themselves in the pursuit of these qualities. The vagaries of popular culture diminish the need for honor and duty at a time when our nation call ill afford to have a generation of men shrink from the legacy of resolve, courage, work ethic and sacrifice that are the foundation of civilization, community and family.

My observation is young men are less likely to seek leadership opportunities and too many hours are spent in the wasteland of gaming, social media and other

pursuits of instant gratification.

This observation is not to imply we have produced a generation of incapable men, but rather a culture that diminishes the need for strong men of wisdom nor does it imply that the rise of women as leaders and innovators should be limited.

The process of moving from childhood to manhood requires action, the development of habits, submission to coaching and mentorship and embracing challenge.

Long before the 4-H motto, Aristotle advocated learning must be accomplished by doing. Young men should actively seek mentors, heroes and role models. I am deeply grateful for the men who influenced and shaped my aspirations and actions.

In their honor, I make these requests: to boys and young men, seek excellence through the development of character; to grown men, seek to mentor and model courage, honor and duty; to mature women, guide boys and young men with both affirmation and an expectation of high character. **A**

Editor's note: Tom Field is a rancher from Parlin, Colo., and the director of the Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

