

OUTSIDE THE BOX

The professional: intentional, competent, trustworthy

by Tom Field, University of Nebraska



Not long ago, as I was trudging through my treadmill workout, I noticed the back of a t-shirt

adorning another middle-aged guy doing battle against the forces of age.

“A skilled lawyer is the next best thing to plain good luck,” it read.

After chuckling to myself that I had finally found a barrister with a sense of humor, the meaning behind the phrase struck home. There are simply times when it is too risky to rely on good luck. There are situations and work that simply require the steady hand of the professional.

What sets professionals apart? Professionals are in demand because they are competent, qualified, skilled, well-prepared and proficient. Because of these capacities, the professional is more valuable in the marketplace and commands higher prices. The work of a professional stands out because it is trustworthy. Professionals are not constrained to any particular walk of life — professional welders, mechanics, janitors, bank tellers, receptionists, plumbers, heavy-equipment operators, baggage handlers, and delivery personnel all make life better for those they serve.

There is a great scene in *Field of Dreams* where Ray and literary professional Terence Mann have gone in search of Moonlight Graham. They meet a small-town newspaper editor who reads the obituary she had written the day that Doc Graham had passed. As she finishes, Mr. Mann compliments her with, “You’re a good writer.”

Without skipping a beat, she pats his arm and replies, “So are you.”

The point — professionalism can be practiced in any realm. Regardless of the luminance of the

spotlight, people recognize quality when they cross its path.

Consider the beef business. Professionalism is needed in an amazing array of job functions — calving, seedstock production, cattle processing, cattle handling, transportation, ration formulation, health management, feed-mill management, fence and facility construction, harvest, packaging, distribution, and the list goes on.

The cowboy expertly sorting and handling a group of long-yearling heifers is no less professional than the veterinarian who will conduct the pregnancy test. The truck driver hauling a set of feeder cattle to the grow yard is no less professional than the nutritional consultant who has prepared the receiving ration.

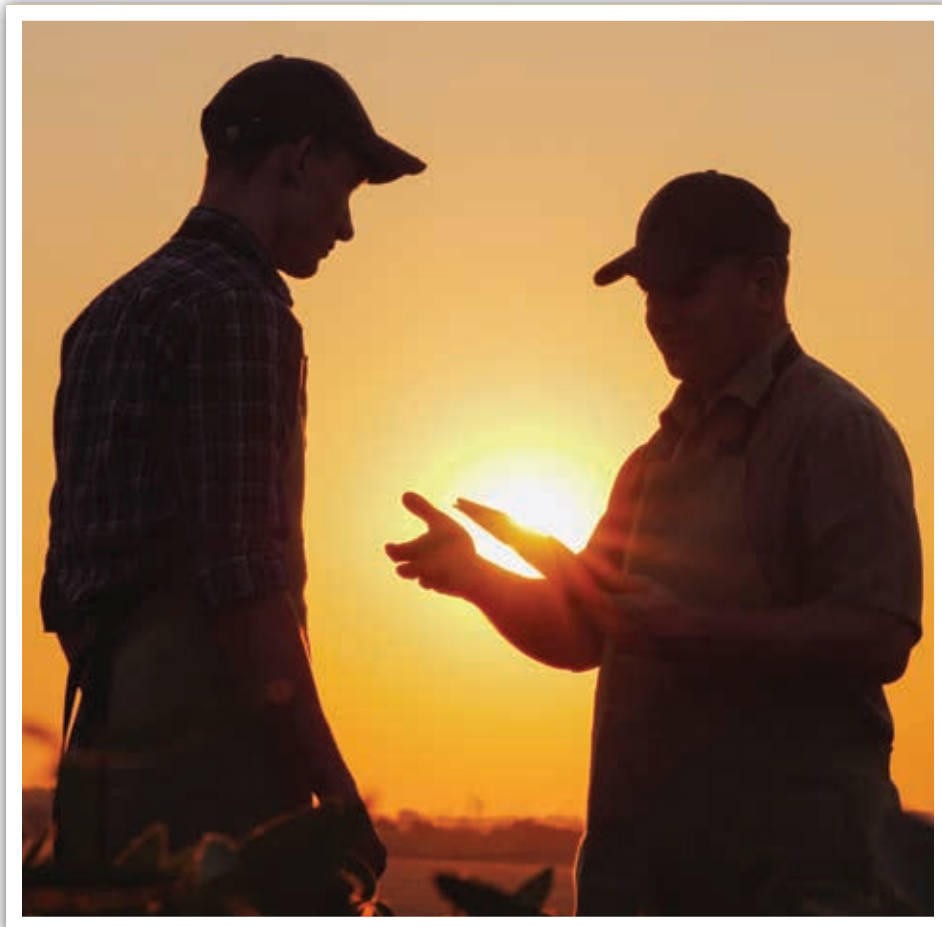
The need for professionalism extends across the full spectrum of the value chain.

Without professionalism within the calving crew all the way to the server presenting a beef entrée to the restaurant customer, trust in our product is eroded. To paraphrase the slogan on that lawyer’s shirt — beef is too valuable to be left to chance.

Are you a professional?

“Am I a professional?” It’s a worthy question; an inquiry that begs our attention and an objective, candid response.

Taking it another step, “Am I producing professional cattle?”



Regardless of the luminance of the spotlight, people recognize quality when they cross its path.

Professional cattle are the basis of trust for the beef industry.

Professional cattle are the result of intentional, thoughtful and competent effort. Cattle left to

chance can only be valued as an undifferentiated commodity because there is limited basis for trust — all decision-making from that point forward involves attempts to “de-risk” the outcome in hopes of capturing some level of margin on the volume.

A dominant driver for nearly every facet of economic and social activity is the deep desire for the establishment of trust. The desire for assurance, integrity and accountability will shape the future.

Professionalism has never been more in demand.

Professionally produced cattle will meet higher standards based on the competence and skill from all engaged in the process; consistent dedicated efforts to be well-prepared and to meet qualifications; and a desire to create market separation via certification and validation. Molding our skills and actions to create an exceptional trust-based reputation is critical to the sustainability of our enterprises and the entirety of the industry. In the future, there will be little room for amateur cattle. |

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.