

Outside the Box

Team health yields sum greater than the parts.

by Tom Field, University of Nebraska–Lincoln



Good health is a state of overall well-being that is measured along a series of related

components. For example, a human is assessed on physical, mental and social indicators of health, with each being important to a person's functionality. In the context of a ranch, health assessment is even more complex given the multitude of interdependent components that comprise the enterprise.

There is, however, one area of well-being that may not receive the attention it deserves — team health. A highly functional team has healthy relationships, effective communication, yields a sum greater than the parts, is fueled by creativity and continuous learning, and positively affects other components of system health.

Most ranches invest significant resources on preventative health care, pay close attention to the role of nutrition in assuring herd health, are intentional to avoid overgrazing, pay close attention to holding invasive species at bay, are invested in good bookkeeping and accounting practices, and pay attention to maintenance of infrastructure and equipment to maintain those assets in strong working order. However, when it comes to dedicating time and

resources to focus on the health of the team of people involved in the ranch, the track record is often less impressive.

Assessing performance

The categories in which performance of the team can be measured include capability, creativity, commitment and coherence.

Capability of the team derives from individual talent and the blending of those talents to achieve the goals and objectives of the organization. Capability springs from training, experience, continuous learning and a desire to achieve the status of the craftsman. Reaching a team's full capability requires humility, the willingness to work together and a sincere desire to be supportive of bringing each team member to new heights of capability.

While raw talent and skill are important, a talented individual who is disruptive to the team inhibits overall success.

Creativity is also an essential characteristic of a good team. Creative teams spend no energy on being right, but rather on finding the right pathways and acting. A team with a culture of creativity handles changing conditions, is unfazed when circumstances are unfavorable, and is exceptionally good at leveraging existing resources to craft solutions.



Don't neglect focusing on the health of the team involved in the work of the ranch.

Commitment is a hallmark of a strong team. Each member is committed to the mission and is willing to sacrifice to help the team achieve its objectives. Commitment results from a confluence of seemingly contrary beliefs — a healthy fear of letting the team down coupled with a belief that each person is capable of superior performance while remaining confident that through tenacity, success will be attained.

Coherence is the glue — the strength of connection that holds the team together. Coherence is fueled by trust and accountability. High-performing teams embrace that which makes them special, with each person willing to play their unique role, but they would be horrified by showboating, taunting or other small behaviors. Because individual members are effective at self-control, disagreement within the team leads to productivity instead of dysfunction.

Must-haves

Research suggests that healthy

and effective teams require the following:

- ▶ Clarity of mission tied to a powerful purpose that elicits a strong sense of caring.
- ▶ Strong structure with the appropriate number of members, skills, autonomy, and interdependence supported by agreement on behavioral standards.
- ▶ Supportive environment where members have access to information, sufficient tools and resources, ongoing learning, and a reward system that supports the organization's highest goals.

Excellent teams must be built, trained, maintained and restored. These investments are key to the health and sustainability of the ranching enterprise. **ABB**

Editor's note: In "Outside the Box," a regular 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.

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