

Outside the Box

Overcoming barriers.

by Tom Field, University of Nebraska–Lincoln



A Virginia surveyor, farmer and soldier stands on a hill overlooking Boston,

Charlestown and Boston Harbor on Aug. 1, 1775. Tall and with the highest of professional bearing and demeanor, his gaze is fixed on the scene below. The harbor is dominated by the warships of the monarchy, and some 7,000 well-trained and well-equipped British regulars occupying the towns cannot be ignored.

Behind him the colonial army is

without a flag, uniforms or any semblance of a cohesive organizational structure. Even the tents and living spaces are haphazard, as if thrown together at a moment's notice.

His Continentals are without artillery and reliable supply lines. There is only enough gunpowder for each member of the force to fire nine rounds. He would later write to a friend that the army under his command was “only the raw ingredient for a potential military force.”

A choice to be made

Given these harsh realities, worry and doubt swirl around General George Washington. Most assuredly there was a struggle between opposing forces fighting to capture his attention — a choice to be made. Submit to the barriers, or be driven by the vision.

Did Washington experience despair? Did he consider giving in to thoughts that the odds were stacked against him and the risk of the undertaking was too great?

We may never know the depths of his internal conflict. We do know that a miracle of epic proportion would emerge — the formation of a new nation, one born of ideas and philosophy focused on the tenets of liberty.

Aspirational view

The beauty of the American experiment is not one of perfection, but rather the efforts of imperfect people seeking to build a more perfect union. Ultimately, it was deep passion for the aspirational vision of liberty, the courage and grit required to make the necessary sacrifices, and a committed partnership with one another that would lay the foundation for a system of self-governance that would disrupt the notion of kings and fiefdoms.

Those actions would open the possibility of opportunity for any person with desire and conviction to build something to call their own. Free enterprise is not the absence of barriers and obstacles, but rather the freedom to wrestle with them.

Those who choose the path of the entrepreneur, creator, builder and innovator as an expression of their freedom owe a debt to those who so painfully paid the price for our liberty. Our collective inheritance will be squandered if we allow the barriers to prevent us from the difficult, yet joyous, work of pursuing the vision.

Free us from ourselves

Twenty decades after the victory obtained by Washington's unconventional army, President

Ronald Reagan would remind us that “there are no constraints on the human mind, no walls around the human spirit, no barriers to our progress except those we ourselves erect.”

Thus, the revolution we must conduct is to declare ourselves free from the tyranny of our own fear, doubt, cynicism, convenience and comfort.

The life of a stockman comes with a guarantee of challenge — barriers constructed by times of drought and times of excess moisture, market volatility, failures and breakdowns of equipment and infrastructure, and a host of other Apollo 13 moments that seem to come out of nowhere.

However, through the application of focused determination and commitment to both problem prevention and solution, we can not only face these barriers, we can overcome them. Defeat comes when we allow internal barriers to be constructed that separate us from our vision and purpose.

When challenges arise, and they will, be reminded of the words of Ralph Marston, who wrote: “There are plenty of difficult obstacles in your path. Don't allow yourself to become one of them.” **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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