

# Outside the Box Things that go bump in the night

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When we were kids the noises and shadows of the night often sent us diving under pillows and comforters like proverbial ostriches. In light of recent events, perhaps the long-necked bird had the right idea when it buried its head in the sand in the hope that all the

frightening things of life would disappear if they couldn't be seen. Unfortunately, we know that the 'ignore it and it will go away' approach is rarely successful.

The last six months have been filled with enough monsters, creepy crawlers and goblins to keep all of us awake at

night. Perhaps we need to heed the advice of parents and grandparents who helped us deal with night terrors by turning on the lights, peering in closets and checking under the bed so that fear could be confronted head on. Fear and worry can lead to paralysis, indecision and the loss of perspective. However, when the source of concern is dealt with and when controllable elements are sifted from that which is beyond our authority, effective decision making and a more balanced viewpoint return to center stage.

Without a doubt, there are plenty of issues on the domestic and international landscape to cause deep concern. But these challenges will only be overcome when individuals, families and communities are empowered with knowledge, resolute determination and a plan of action.

We must also recognize the lessons of the past; the American saga is crafted from innovation, sacrifice, hard work and an abiding sense of thankfulness for the blessings that have been bestowed upon the nation. There is much to be learned from our ancestors who had the courage to declare themselves free of tyranny; to hold the republic together in times of economic and political upheaval; to build and sustain communities when faced with harsh economic and social conditions; and who maintained an environment in which free enterprise, self determination and accountability could flourish.

## Turning the light on

How do we empower ourselves to deal with those things that go bump in the night? Unfortunately, no sure-fire formula exists, but perhaps the following ideas will help stimulate the process of tackling the future:

- Reclaim the responsibilities of citizenship. Citizenship has become far too passive a role for most Americans. Direct communication with elected officials, involvement in local, state and national policy processes, and becoming informed about the issues have never been more important than they are now. We must engage with decision makers and the process of government if we are to build a better future for our children.
- Develop a deeper understanding of the business enterprise. Sound, analytical information is critical to making good decisions, especially in times when margins are ultra-thin. Trend analysis in financial and production categories provides a foundation upon which management can best seek the route to survival and, ultimately, success. Access

to capital and other resources will come to those who can support their requests with sound information.

- Learn and implement low-stress cattle handling techniques. People are being subjected to monumental levels of stress. Too often this yields frustration manifested in less-than-ideal handling of our resources. Low-stress cattle handling protocols are a buffer to help reduce the stress on both people and animals while providing an opportunity to improve profitability through better handling techniques.
- Implement Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) procedures and other protocols designed to build pride of ownership. At the very core of our being is the desire for excellence and even in tough times, investment in cost-effective strategies that build brand equity will have both short- and long-term benefits. Pride of ownership is a hedge against cynicism and poor workmanship, which ultimately lead to poorer productivity, loss of customer satisfaction and reduced profits.
- Invest in the community. I have marveled at the sense of commitment to rebuilding towns and neighborhoods devastated by tornados, floods and hurricanes. That same spirit is critical to not only surviving the current economic downturn, but assuring that when we get to the other side of the crisis we have the infrastructure and relationships upon which to build.
- Mentor the next generation. Each crisis of history provides fertile ground for the effective mentoring and training of young people. Building positive skills, attitudes and behaviors in the next generation is of the utmost importance to the future. The need for successful youth programs has never been more essential to the future of productive and healthy communities. An investment of time in mentoring will yield substantial benefits.
- Look for the miracles. Tough times won't last forever but while we deal with them, it is important to recognize the blessings that surround us. Family, friends, newborn calves, the promise of spring, the beauty of fall foliage, an act of kindness to a stranger, a helping hand to a neighbor and the power of holding the hand of someone we love provide ample reminders that life is still full of promise and filled with miracles.

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