**The Cowboy Way**

Over the past few years, I’ve heard various corporate leaders refer to the Code of the West as a source of inspiration and principled leadership. Based on home-spun philosophy steeped in practicality, James P. Owen captured the spirit of the Code in his book *Cowboy Ethics: What It Takes to Win in Life.*

Intrigued, I bought the book and invited Mr. Owen to speak to OK Ethics later this month. It surprised me to learn that he is not actually a cowboy. This talented writer is the son of a Kentucky dentist and spent decades as a Wall Street executive. Disgusted by the greed and corruption he encountered there, Owen began searching for a better way, asking himself what it takes to be truly successful in life. That led him to do extensive research on his childhood hero – the American cowboy.

Owen isn’t referencing the slick ones of the silver screen variety. Instead, he focuses on the hard- working people who tend cattle in bitter Oklahoma winters and the scorching summer sun. Cowboys in Owen’s book are direct, authentic and can be trusted to close a deal with a handshake. They possess the character traits that we long to see in our leaders, whether in the corporate boardrooms or our houses of government. We need these plain-talking, keep-it-simple, everyday heroes who truly understand what is important in life.

Could anyone be a hero? According to Owen, we all have the capability and he provides some insights through his Four-Legged Stool Approach, summarized below:

1. **Attitude:** The determination to tackle challenges head-on and bear responsibility for outcomes.
2. **Integrity:** The clarity and fortitude to do the right thing – no matter what.
3. **Grit:** Strength to persevere through life’s injustices, injuries, and disappointments - resolving to overcome them.
4. **Purpose:** This should not be confused with a short-lived goal, but driven by a passionate aspiration transcending the frustrations of daily life.

The point is not to romanticize the cowboy, but realize that the honorable aspects of the cowboy’s humble way of life are attainable. As Owen points out, each of us can be heroes in our own lives. Understand that true success involves embracing good character traits of reliability, honesty and determination. Standing tall and leading.

As one friend recalled from a Western quote, “If you’re tired of eating dust, stop following the herd.”

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