

The Cowboy Code



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A good dose of cowboy code of ethics would be a great place to start if we were to change America today.

The western code as written by business ethics mentor Jim Owen describes these guiding principles of life as: 1) live each day with courage, 2) take pride in your work, 3) always finish what you start, 4) do what has to be done, 5) be tough, but fair, 6) when you make a promise keep it, 7) ride for the brand (which translates to be loyal), 8) talk less and say more, 9) remember that some things aren't for sale and 10) know where to draw the line. Today's examples in society are a far cry from the authentic cowboy code that Owen describes.

Regardless of party affiliation, these days we see rambling politicians who speak out of both sides of their mouths saying one thing and doing another. Self-preservation seems to trump good governance. We see society put professional athletes up on a pedestal who are more into self-marketing than they are into team commitment. Our kids need examples and opportunities to develop character traits beyond what society has deemed acceptable.

There was a time in this country when a person didn't expect to be entitled to anything. You had to earn it, and there were no excuses. Today, that philosophy seems to be the exception to the rule.

In rural America you can find hard-working people

who know the value of their time and how to maximize its potential. There's no political union rep looking after them, and there is no expectation beyond what hard work, Mother Nature, and free markets offer.

To add to Jim Owens' code, patriotism, honor, selflessness, pride in your work, honesty and standing up for what's right are all character traits of the authentic cowboy. They are a code of ethics that is not just about the boots and the hat but are universal principles that lead to successful businesses, families and community relationship, whether that be local school board, city government, church or your state and national cattlemen organizations.

Those of us who are involved in the beef cattle industry and who were fortunate enough to be raised with rural values have all gotten a dose of cowboy teaching from someone along the way. The members of the American Hereford Association (AHA) provide opportunities for our young people to gain cowboy wisdom through the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) and the largest youth beef breed show in the world, the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE).

July 9-16 the 2011 JNHE was hosted at the American Royal in Kansas City, Mo. More than 640 young people and their families from 39 states descended on the home of the AHA, some driving three days with cattle in

tow to compete, learn, interact, network and enjoy one another's company.

It was hot, the days were long, and from before daylight until way after dark, cattle were tended to, fitted and shown, and families worked hard to encourage and support the growth and development of their young Hereford breeders. There were those who made it to the winners' backdrop for their champion photos from the showing along with more than 20 other competitive events involving professional development, but that was not what was most important about the event.

The most important part was the learning experience that came along with the trip. The commitment to hard work and long hours, the family time together, the teamwork, putting the welfare of your investment, your family and your organization above your own, developing new relationships, and getting the job done were things that made the event so great. These are all great lessons from our cowboy heritage and code — lessons that will make our young Hereford breeders great Americans.

A big thank you to all of the adult leaders and volunteers from Kansas who did such a wonderful job of organizing and hosting the 2011 JNHE; your hospitality was second to none. Parents, thank you for your support and love of your children and your support and love for this great beef cattle industry. **HW**