

WHO ARE YOUR HEROES?

LEGACY LEADERS | BY KEVIN SPAFFORD

THE HEROES I look up to wear plaid and denim, work from dawn till dusk, and produce the food and fiber that feed and clothe the world. They contribute to the community, care for the land and constantly seek to improve their results. In other words, not all heroes earn stripes or carry a gun.

All don't play with a city name emblazoned across their chest, a number on their back, or a ball in their hand. My heroes are the agripreneurs of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

They're the farmers, ranchers and agribusiness owners who plow fields, herd cattle and grow things. They sweat and sometimes swear. They're an outstanding lot who start with a singular idea to improve results, and through a force of nature and decisive actions, they change the world. They work steady and show common sense. They're farming professionals using their skills, talents and resources to improve our lives.

Over the last several years, I've had the good fortune to meet with and learn from some of agriculture's best. From across the U.S., though crops and methods vary, America's ag community is full of leaders whose character is worthy of



hero status. So what, you may ask, are those characteristics that make someone a hero? Here are a few examples:

Dedication. I've worked with a cattleman whose sole purpose was to offer a quality product and a fair return. Today, his family operation is among the top in the U.S. He started as a rancher, developed a feedlot and then grew into multiple feedyard sites across the Southwest. Well beyond the norm, this dedicated agripreneur is continuing to improve beef products for today's consumers.

Self-reliance. By starting at a young age, this producer learned self-reliance. He began with a singular product and developed multiple processes. Failure was never final for this agripreneur. He encouraged others by shouldering the blame for each less-than-successful attempt and shared the credit for every breakthrough. Relying on self does not mean going it

alone; rather, it signifies a force of will and supports the actions necessary.

Interdependent. Not as an opposite of self-reliance, but as a complement to the power of teamwork, true heroes know that success is always the result of a team effort. For this farming professional, the concept of team was born out of necessity.

With the sudden death of her father, she had to manage harvest, market the crop and ready the ground for the next year. After a season or two, she was comfortable as a team leader directing the efforts of others.

Commitment. Though he didn't grow up in a farming family, this young producer was determined to learn the craft and establish a farming operation of his own. For him, "no" wasn't a deterrent, but an invitation to try harder. He started by leasing a few acres, and later bought a bit of ground and leased even more. Today, this father of three is one of the largest farmers in the area. He continues to grow his influence, expand operations and encourage others.

Industrious. When we started working together, this dairyman was just beginning to expand. His son was graduating from college soon, and Dad

wanted to make room for him in the operation. Though the dairy was big enough for one family, it wouldn't support two. Once the process began, they worked together and found that one plus one equals more than two. Today, father and son have exceeded their original plans and continue to expand. They talk more like corporate executives than dairymen, and spend more time poring over spreadsheets than maintaining milking equipment.

So what about you? We're all enriched with some innate talent or capability. We all have some level of drive or interest. What's yours, and how can you develop those natural skills and abilities that will allow you to grow professionally?

One of my favorite quotes comes from Marianne Williamson: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure."

Each of us can adopt the traits of a hero and make a difference. **FF**

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