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Attributes of Champions: 5 Key Principles From World Class Cowboys

Recently I attended the **National Rodeo Finals (NRF)** and Convention in [Las Vegas, Nevada](#) for the first time. While there, I listened to several workshop presenters from the **PRCA (Pro Rodeo Cowboy Association)** discuss best practices in the rodeo business. My purpose, as the new Chairman of the [Ogden Pioneer Days Foundation](#) in [Utah](#), was to learn all I could about how to enhance our own activities and rodeo programs, which are already first rate.

Our festivities, now in their 79th year, take place every July to celebrate the pioneers' arrival in 1847 to the valleys of the Wasatch mountain range. These early ancestors were rugged farmers and ranchers who earned their livings off the land. Horses and cattle were assets they owned, and were part of their daily lives. Learning to ride a palomino and tossing a rope over the head of a wayward calf was a basic and necessary skill for many workers in those days.

As you can imagine, in time the young men with a competitive nature formed ad hoc events to demonstrate the abilities they had honed to ride a bucking bronco, with or without a saddle. Those who were fearless also proudly climbed aboard a crazed 2,000-pound bull for a few seconds ride. Winners were applauded; losers nursed their wounded egos and broken bones. That celebrated tradition continues today, not only in Utah but across **America** where more than 30 million fans watch thousands of riders and ropers compete for prizes and recognition at more than 1,500 professional rodeos every year.

This year at the NRF, the 15 best US cowboys came together in each of 7 categories to compete for the honor and glory of being the best of the best, in bareback riding, steer wrestling, team roping, saddle bronc riding, tie down roping, steer roping and bull riding. What makes these warriors so great?



Trevor Brazile, of Decatur, Texas, clinches 10th All-Around Title at the National Rodeo Finals, Dec. 11, 2012 in Las Vegas (Photo courtesy of AP)

What is it about these remarkable lads that separates them from the other wranglers? I chatted with several PRCA golden buckle **Champion Cowboys of the Year** to learn their competitive secrets and how they might apply to the business world. It didn't take them long to answer my questions. In sum, here are the five principles they follow that make them better than anyone else. Successful entrepreneurs can learn to do them as well.

"We wake up every morning knowing we can and will be winners," they said. "It's who we are. We see ourselves doing well and winning. We are not worried about the competition. We just know that if we do our very best we will be in a great position to walk away after an event with the trophy."

"In a way, we are fearless. We don't worry about the odds. We have this faith, this hope that things will go our way. We also are very appreciative and grateful for the opportunities that have been given to us."

"We have a clear vision of what we want to be and what we want to achieve. We know how to get there and what will be required of us. We have learned to be flexible and patient. We don't allow distractions into our lives that might take us off course. We also recognize we must overcome all obstacles and barriers. We know success is not a gift. It requires hard work and determination."



Dean Gorsuch of Gering, Neb. drags a steer to the ground while competing in the steer wrestling competition on the sixth night of the National Finals Rodeo, Monday, Dec. 10, 2012, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/Julie Jacobson)

"We are also good at what we do because we have studied, learned and practiced our focused activity.

We have watched, tried, failed, and tried again until we did it correctly, repeatedly. We have analyzed our accomplishments and our mistakes. We know what works and doesn't. We are highly focused, committed and have made this endeavor our highest priority. Our energy is spent on achieving our loftiest goals. We're sure we have spent at least 10,000 hours in perfecting our skills."

"We have engaged the best coaches and advisors. They know their stuff. They've been there and know what to tell us to succeed. We are good listeners. We follow their counsel exactly. We also appreciate their constructive criticism. For sure, there have been times when they were pretty tough on us and we wanted to shrink away. It's not easy being told how bad we are doing. But we are grateful for their encouragement and motivational enthusiasm."

"Lastly, we deeply appreciate our many supporters; wonderful and tireless individuals who take care of critical tasks that need to happen for us to excel. They are there with the right tools and resources to facilitate and smooth the way. We couldn't make it without them. We do our very best to recognize and honor their many kind and thoughtful services on our behalf."

In a nutshell, then, what can we learned from these world class cowboys?

1. We need a positive, winning attitude.

We should arrive at work each day knowing we can be successful, and then give each task our very best effort. We should end the day with a resolve to learn from our mistakes and to celebrate every achievement. We should also be grateful for the opportunities we have received.

2. We need to have clear goals.

Every winner needs a purposeful vision, a thoughtful strategy and well defined tactics to achieve stated objectives. Champions know where they are going and how to get there. They have a well conceived plan and they follow it.

3. We need to study, learn and practice.

Highly successful business leaders are great students. They know how and what to study. They learn lessons well and they retain needed information. They also apply what they have been taught with precision.



Alan and Jeanne Hall at the National Rodeo Finals in Las Vegas, Dec. 2012

4. We need mentors.

No one can succeed alone. We all need coaches and advisors who have gained knowledge from their experiences and who are willing to share with us what they have learned. We should be humble and willing to follow their great counsel.

5. We need a support team.

No matter what our assignment is, we all need the kind assistance of others, both supervisors and subordinates, who can lighten our heavy loads and clear our path. Being grateful for their support is fundamental to our long term success.

Whether they be world class cowboys, award winning athletes or highly praised executives, champions all possess a passion to win and a deep desire to follow time tested patterns for success. Please consider the points I have shared as your keys to success. And thank you for reading.

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