

John Wayne, the Businessman by Ron White

There were few things that marked my boyhood as strongly as westerns. Every Sunday, I arranged my afternoon around *The Lone Ranger*, *The Rifleman* and *Bonanza*. Then, if I was lucky, I would catch a glimpse of what I considered to be the definition of the word “man” – John Wayne” in a late-night western.

My grandmother had a painting of him in her living room, and in my blue-collar family he was a hero. Maybe it was because the characters he portrayed exhibited the qualities that my family lived, blue-collar, hard-working and honest. I am proud to say that I have a doctorate in John Wayne.

In 1972, Wayne played a character in which he mentored schoolboys on a cattle drive in the film *The Cowboys*. Because of his leadership and example, these boys became men before the end of the cattle drive. They would avenge “The Duke’s” death after he was gunned down in cold blood. This was my favorite John Wayne movie, perhaps because I also was a young boy and I subconsciously knew that I was being mentored through a television screen by the rugged cowboy. Today, I believe I am a better businessman because of it.

If “The Duke” were a businessman in the present day, I assure you that he would:

First and foremost, be honest. This cowboy would never lie to make a sale and neither should you. His resume wouldn’t exaggerate and you could rely on his word.

Be a hard worker. John Wayne would be the first cowboy on his horse preparing for the cattle drive, and he would be the first in your office, spending his time working to the point of exhaustion.

Defend the weak. Whether in *Stagecoach*, *True Grit*, *The Cowboys* or another film, Wayne never took advantage of the weak. Instead, he protected those who couldn’t protect themselves. If he was in your office when a salesperson or professional was struggling, there is no doubt in my mind that he would ride alongside them and offer assistance to make the team better.

Feo, Fuerte y Formal. These were the words that Wayne wanted on his tombstone. They translate to: “He was ugly, strong and had dignity.” He was a physically strong man at 6’4”. Yet, it was his strength of character that was referred to here. In your business, you would be a magnificent success if others say you have strength of character. This means not giving in when things look bleak. “The Duke” wouldn’t.

Have dignity. This, again, comes from his self-description. Dignity means relying on yourself for your success and abandoning the victim mentality. Wayne would not be a victim if he worked in your office. He would not blame his lack of success on the economy, co-workers or his boss. Instead, with dignity he would take his future into his own hands and rely on no one but himself for his success.

John Wayne was the definition of the word *man* and would be the definition of the word *businessman* if he worked in your office today. As a young boy, I watched John Wayne ride off into the sunset on June 11, 1979. Though I was confident one day that I would be a cowboy, I ended up a businessman. Today, I am a better businessman because of John Wayne’s lessons.

Thanks to John Wayne for the life lessons on hard work, honesty, dignity, strength and compassion. With a tip of my hat, I give him a hardy, “Thanks, partner.”