

### Let's be honest



I hate to quibble with the pontificators of ancient wisdom, but I've found that a lot of the old bromides that we repeat as undeniable truths are flat out lies. Take this one: "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise."

Haven't we all known a broken down old cowboy who got up before the sun, and went down when it did, who suffered from rheumatism, gout, boils, corns, conniptions and consumption and then died prematurely, so broke that his buddies had to buy him a box to be buried in?

So much for being healthy, wealthy and wise!

Then there's this one: "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." This one particularly galls me because I've eaten two cups of apple sauce every day for the last 20 years and I see more of my doctor than his wife, kids and pill salesmen do.

Whoever first uttered the words, "Honesty is the best policy," must not have been married. You're telling me that if your pleasantly plump wife asks, "Does this dress make me look fat?" that you are going to look her in the eye and tell her the truth, knowing it will land you in the doghouse for at least a week?

Or wives, if your husband finally takes you on that vacation you've been begging for and at its conclusion asks you if you enjoyed the hog hunt, you're telling me that you're going to be honest and tell him that you hated every tick-infested minute, knowing that he'll never take you anywhere ever again? (Except to a bull sale, maybe.)

It was on my first job after college that I began questioning conventional wisdom. I'd like to say that I was the manager of a purebred cattle operation, but since honesty is supposedly the best

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Written by Lee Pitts

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policy, I am forced to admit that I was a hired hand working for next-to-nothing. The owner of the cattle didn't believe in frivolous spending, so he raised his own herd bulls, married the cook/housecleaner so he didn't have to pay her and paid me so little that I didn't have enough money to leave.

His cattle showed the lack of high-priced genetics. His 2-year-old bulls could limbo under a four-wheel drive pickup with four flat tires, and the grass was often taller than the cows, which made them hard to check. This was in the 1970s when everyone wanted their cattle tall and long.

You could judge a cattle show with a tape measure, and the cattle got so meatless that buying a steak was like playing Russian Roulette in that you had a one in six chance of having a pleasurable eating experience. It looked like we were raising cattle for bigger hides, not better steaks.

My boss sold some of his bulls at a college gain-test sale. The coward couldn't go to the sale (I've often wondered if he just didn't want to suffer the humiliation), so he stayed home and sent me to be embarrassed. Before I left he handed me a couple \$20 bills and said, "Buy everyone who looks at our bulls lunch at the sale."

That night when I got back to the ranch the boss was eagerly waiting for a report on how his cattle sold that day. Having been taught that honesty is always the best policy, I handed him back the two 20 dollar bills he'd given me that morning and said, "No one looked at your bulls."

Okay, so maybe I was a bit blunt and should have sugarcoated it. Perhaps I should have just told him that I ran out of his money buying all the interested buyers lunch. I could have been more tactful, and I didn't have to pick right then to hand him a fistful of invoices from the college for the feed and sale expense.

Oh, and by the way, NONE of his bulls sold that day. But no, I had to be honest and in so doing I deeply wounded this prideful man, so much so that he dispersed his herd shortly thereafter and hardly spoke to me for years when we met at the post office.

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In hindsight, I should have just done what any politician would have done and just pocketed the 40 bucks.

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