Written by Jane Alexander, Editor-In-Chief
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Someone once asked me why I use so many analogies in my writing. It's simple. I think in them.

They enable me, as a non-technical person, to understand what you do in your jobs. They also allow me, as a non-artist, to paint pictures in words to communicate about things that (I think) might be of interest to you.

Just about anything can smack me upside the head and worm its way into my writing: chasing the fat rabbits in life (as opposed to the skinny ones); peeling the energy onion; thanking those who packed your parachute, etc. I certainly don't claim ownership of these things. I just use them to drive home whatever points I'm trying to make at a given time. Take the title of this column.

I grew up hearing the term "riding for the brand" and have frequently harnessed some variation of it during my life—*forgive the pun*—to help me deliver a message. As I recall, I've typically turned to it to clarify for employers (or prospective employers) how I approach a job, as in "I ride for the brand."

Today, as I work on Dave Krings' "Viewpoint" entitled, "Get Out There And Lead...Every Day" (pg. 40), I can't help but think of this old expression as a picture-perfect analogy.

Nobody really knows who coined the phrase. Google "riding for the brand" and you'll find any number of references (including motivational treatises, novels, lyrics, etc.). One fairly concise definition comes from a 2008 blog by someone named Nathan S. Collier (www.NSCBlog.com), who borrowed from the Website of Montana Bunkhouses Working Ranch Vacations (www.montanabunkhouses.com). According to these two sources, the term comes from the cattle-ranching days of America's Old West. Back then—*as it still should be today*—"The brand was a ranch's trademark, representing pride, duty and stewardship, while inspiring loyalty, dedication and cowboy camaraderie. When you rode for the brand, it meant that you had signed on to the mission, that you had committed, that you were a dedicated team player. If you weren't, then you had no business being on the ranch's payroll."

The way I look at it, Dave Krings assumes that leaders are going to be "riding for the brand," whatever the brand may be. He calls on you to ride hard—maybe harder than you thought you could. No matter how tough times are, or how swamped you are, he encourages you to constantly be improving something around your operations. While his challenge is directed specifically at those in the maintenance and reliability field, it's applicable to all lines of work. After all, when you get down to it, isn't doing the best job possible—*and leading*—all about pride ... duty ... stewardship ... loyalty ... dedication...?

Several poets/songwriters have reflected at length on what it truly means to "ride for the brand." I think the great Red Steagall may have summed it up best in a sweet poem by that same name: *"Son, a man's brand is his own special mark that says this is mine, leave it alone. You hire out to a man, ride for his brand and protect it like it was your own."**

So, how about it? Are you riding for the brand? You don't have to be a cowboy, you know. **MT**
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*Steagall, Red. "Ride for the Brand," Ride for the Brand, Bunkhouse Press, 2000. (Hardcover editions of this compilation of poetry, music and original artwork by members of the Cowboy Artists of America are available through Amazon.com for $24.95.)