

Final Turn

A MODEST PROPOSAL By Rob Whiteley

Preface. Recent cooperative efforts between important industry groups give hope we may yet emerge as a less dysfunctional Thoroughbred family.

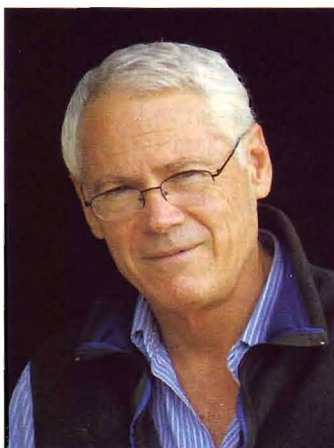
On the racing front, Churchill Downs and Magna found enough common ground to forge several joint ventures that could raise all of our boats. On the sales front, Keeneland and Fasig-Tipton (along with the Consignors and Commercial Breeders Association and veterinary representatives) formed a committee to control steroid use, and, one would assume, other negative sales practices. In addition, the Sales Integrity Task Force was re-formed with broad representation to improve the sales scene and develop proactive measures to avoid layers of governmental oversight.

This urgently needed cooperation comes in the nick of time, as we are desperate to attract new owners and fans and win back TV ratings and market share. But these are baby steps, and we need to broaden and build on these efforts. Our choice is simple. We can work together to fix our problems and resuscitate our sport, or we can watch our business steadily erode and shrink away until we are merely playing with ourselves. Instead of being adversaries and wrangling, we need to join our minds and resources to fight against our real competition (casinos and other forms of gaming, off-shore betting, NASCAR, the NFL, MLB, etc.). Our opponents are hungry, focused, skillful predators who have already had us for breakfast while we conduct "business as usual." If we don't act together quickly, they will also have us for lunch and dinner.

So what will it take to achieve unity and a shared vision? The biggest obstacles are: (1) Our failure of empathy (meaning we have limited understanding of what it is like to be in each other's shoes); and (2) Many industry decision-makers and others with power and influence are not stakeholders, have little risk and accountability, and lack perspective because they do not know what it is like to "walk the walk."

Therefore, to create a common bond based on empathy and shared risk, I propose the following:

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The Proposal. Every member of the Thoroughbred family will contribute to industry well-being by immediately investing his or her own money (preferably their life savings) as follows:

Breeders will stay in for 20% of every racing prospect they sell for more than five times the stud fee.

Consignors and bloodstock agents will stay in for 2% of every horse they sell or buy for more than \$100,000. Stallion owners will rebate the difference whenever a foal or yearling sells for less than the advertised stud fee. Veterinarians working at the sales will own mares and sell their produce at auction, with other vets doing the vet work at standard "fixed" rates. Veterinarians working at the clinics will conduct and pay for research correlating all procedures they perform with

later racing success. Veterinarians working at a racetrack will own racehorses and have other veterinarians "vet" their horses at standard "fixed" rates. Trainers will pay for 10% of owners' veterinary bills out of their cut of purse earnings. Jockeys will own racehorses that will be ridden by other jockeys. Sales company executives will own mares and will sell their produce at another sales company's auction. Journalists and all others who comment on the industry will own mares, sell half of the offspring at auction, and race the other half. Appointed members of racing com-

missions will pay for a three-month internship, splitting their time between turning out mares and foals at a breeding farm and hand-walking hots in a racetrack shed row. Track executives and racing officials (including the NTRA, Breeders' Cup, and The Jockey Club) will own racehorses, apply for racing licenses without the assistance of secretaries, enter through general admission gates, eat daily at a different track concession stand, and wager \$500 twice a week at a \$2 window.

Epilogue. OK, so none of this will really happen, although most of it should. The point is that without having an understanding of what each person goes through to put on the show, we cannot achieve mutuality or comprehend the impact our decisions and actions have on others. Clearly, we need to get on the same page, work together with a generous spirit, and feel and act like we are on the same team. And, unless we work very well together very soon, the sound we hear will not be the roar of the crowd, but the fat lady clearing her throat. ☐