

Right out of a John Wayne movie . . .

When I was about eight or nine, I hoarded comic books. Didn't we all? War stories, alien invasions, romantic adventures, superheroes, westerns . . .

Of the hundreds I devoured, two left lasting impressions.

One had such a horrific ending that any plot based on mistaken identity infuriates me even today and scarred me for years.

But the other absolutely inspired me, and still does . . .

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The story begins with a plot right out of a John Wayne movie. A small town in the Old West dominated by a killer and his gang. The town council secretly sends a messenger to fetch the famed good-guy gunslinger Bart, and a few days later he rides into town with his sidekick Johnny.

Bart is so handsome the girls all swoon and the young'uns swarm around to ask him awed questions about his horse and his boots and his guns and his . . . well, you get the picture. He's a walking advertisement for the finest outfitters in the West, sports a silver gunbelt with silver holsters and silver pistols – and flashes a grin as wide as a country mile.

Johnny's another matter. He's fat, slovenly, hardly ever speaks and pretty much disappears into the background. He's basically there to take care of Bart's horse.

The killer isn't all that worried, even when he realizes Bart's in town. After all, he has five other cowpokes workin' for him, and they're all slick gunhands (sorry about this – the old language just kinda creeps onto my keyboard).

Nothin' much happens for a couple days. Bart checks into the town's only hotel, Johnny bunks with the horses in a nearby corral. The killer and his crew hang out at the saloon (where else?), drinkin' whiskey straight from the bottle, starin' ferociously at strangers who come through the doors, and tellin' lies to a dozen other layabouts.

But of course everybody knows a showdown's comin'. Shortly after noon on the third day, Bart sends a kid to fetch Johnny, who shows up a few minutes later wearin' a gunbelt of his own, with two holsters and guns.

Bart and Johnny start walkin' across the dusty street (has to be dusty, right?) and Bart pushes his way through the doors of the saloon. Johnny sidles in behind him and stands to the side. Everybody else clears out while the killer and his five gang members range themselves around the room and stare at Bart, who tells the killer he'd better get outa town before it's too late. The killer laughs and Bart says I really think you oughta git while the gittin's good and the killer laughs again and signals his gang and suddenly all six of them go for their guns at the same time.

Bart never moves.

But Johnny draws and shoots all six of 'em dead before any of the guns even clear their holsters!

WOW!

The eight-year-old Jerr never saw *that* one comin'! Each time I think about that story even today it makes me smile – and I'll bet every boy who read that comic book came away feeling better about himself.

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So what's the point?

Well, three of them, actually:

- There's a dirty little secret about business that offends the sensibilities of many people in the nonprofit world, where nobody's supposed to "lose" and everybody's supposed to play the game fairly.

That doesn't work in the marketplace. You only win if you have an "unfair" competitive advantage -- and it's only unfair in the eyes of the losers. The advantage can be just about anything. A patent. A distribution process. A sole-source contract. Deep pockets. A logo. A devilish technology.

Bart had Johnny. What's *your* unfair competitive advantage?

- Every social enterprise needs to display an appealing face to the world -- and that job falls to the CEO, who represents the company at public forums, on Capitol Hill, in meetings with potential investors . . . but CEOs shouldn't get involved with operations. That's the COO's job. CEOs may wear the stylish clothing and the ready smiles – but somewhere back in the shop Johnny's making it happen. The public never really knows or cares. When Bart and Johnny left the saloon, they were the only ones who knew what had really occurred – so everybody hailed Bart as a hero and Johnny trudged away to get the horses.

What do you think? Is *your* CEO wasting too much time meddling in day-to-day operations instead of concentrating on marketing and strategic planning?

- When a disruptive new company appears on the scene and changes everything, almost nobody sees it coming. Did IBM, Control Data, NCR and the other elephants in the computer industry see Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Andy Grove and Larry Ellison coming? Nope.

The killer and his gang never saw Johnny coming either. He was right there in plain sight, but nobody noticed.

So what are *you* failing to notice?