

The 22nd Worshipful Company of Farmers, Challenge of Rural Leadership Course (CRL)

January 7th – 20th 2018

Dartington Hall, Duchy College, Rural Business School.

The Challenge of Rural Leadership (CRL) course is intensive to say the least, yet is invigorating in its content. The Worshipful Company of Farmers invest in the course which is brought together by Richard Soffe, David Kerr and their team of wonderful helpers (photo 1). The interesting aspect of the course is that through fantastic behind the scene organisation, the course days are left for the group to facilitate, allowing the group participants an opportunity to lead and to follow.

The course is limited to 18 participants from differing areas within the agricultural sphere, CRL 2018 participants consisted of four farmers, three farm managers, three land surveyors, five industry representatives and two government sector employees (photo 2) It was plainly said by Richard and Geoff on a number of occasions that the 22nd Challenge of Rural Leadership group was by far the most co-operative and favourite to date. As a group we co-operatively agreed that this must be correct, given our successes and general feelings on the matter.



Photo 1: Richard Soffe, Becky Wilson, Ali Brunkum, Sue Vanstone



Photo 2: L to R

Back Row; James Speers, Penny Montgomerie, Andrew Wilson, Chris Edmunds, Michael Reynolds, Bob Nixon, Tin Ledbury, Matthew Bell, Stephen Lowe, Jim Hayes

Middle Row; Bernadette Mortensen, Gemma Rowlands, Christine McDowell, Russel Carrington, Vicky Robinson, Matthew Hague, Rebecca Lamb, Claire Wright

Front Row; (Worshipful Company) Rachel Watkins, Mike Rowe, Karen Mercer, The Master Julian Sayers, Richard Davies, Edward Hitchcock, Richard Soffe, David Kerr

We have all been to courses where we think “I’ll never get that time back” or perhaps needed to use Homer Simpson glasses to mask sleeping eyes, this however was not an issue, as nothing about CRL 2018 course was boring. The course began with an “ice breaker” session, it set the tone for the next two weeks as being an interactive and effective learning environment, the result being that our name badges became defunct, as we easily recalled each other’s names plus some interesting, if not entirely, accurate facts.

During the first week the group undertook a case study of Riverford Organics, an organic farming and boxed ingredients business. Peter Redstone of the Barefoot Thinking Company, introduced decision making skills to the



Photo 3; Bernadette Mortensen and Peter Redstone (Barefoot Thinking Company)

group, the interesting and valuable aspect of Peter’s approach was the tools were explained in 10 minutes and the remainder of the session was used to put the learning into practice. For those of us that are visual and “learn by doing” types of people, this was an excellent approach. New tools were introduced as the group progressed through the case study to build on our decision making “tool kit”. The case study was a challenge in that it required a large group of people to interact, work independently as well as cooperatively, for the greater good.

Photo 4 (right); Team work

Matthew Hague, Andrew Wilson, Bernadette Mortensen

Photo 5;(below) Team work

Penny Montgomerie, James Speers, Bernadette Mortensen, Michael Reynolds



The task required that we trust the process, methods and the participants, with the view that we could get through the large volume of work and be a cohesive team, resulting in a well received and polished presentation of our recommendations to Roja Buck and Guy Watson, the CEO of Riverford Organics.



Photo 6: L to R Riverford Organics Presentation

Back Row; Penny Montgomerie, Rebecca Lamb, Matthew Bell, Gemma Rowlands, James Speers, Michael Reynolds, Russel Carrington, Andrew Wilson, Matthew Hague, Tim Ledbury, Bob Nixon, Stephen Lowe, Claire Wright

Front Row; Bernadette Mortensen, Jim Hayes, Chris Edmunds, Roja Buck, Guy Watson, Richard Soffe, Vicky Robinson, Christine McDowell



On the back of elation due to the success of our presentation to Riverford Organics, it may have been reasonable to think Sunday was a time for rest, rather it was a different type of classroom. We were blessed with a wonderful day of weather, where we challenged our minds and bodies with the Dynamic Adventures group on the Dartington adventure courses. It was a time for informal interactions, solidifying our friendships and just having a bit of fun.

Photo 7; Dynamic Adventures

LtoR Back Row; Tim Ledbury, Claire Wright, Russ Carrington, Andrew Wilson, Chris Edmunds, Bob Nixon Middle Row; James Speers, Vicky Robinson, Gemma Rowlands, Michael Reynolds, Matthew Hague, Penny Montgomery, Stephen Lowe, Christine McDowell, Jim Hayes Front Row; Bernadette Mortensen, Matthew Bell, Rebecca Lamb

For some of us it was the pure joy of a challenge, yet for others it was a step outside of their comfort zones and an opportunity for the rest of us to practice our leadership skills in supporting our less comfortable mates.

In the evening, The Playing Dead Murder Mystery team had us deciding “who dun it” in a fun 1920’s themed Murder Mystery, and it wasn’t the butler!



Photo 8: Murder Mystery Evening L to R

Bob Nixon, Chris Edmunds, Gemma Rowlands, Bernadette Mortensen, Rebecca Lamb, Christine McDowell

Week two focused on the many aspects of leadership, beginning with understanding the fundamentals of who we are through psychometric analysis provided by The Elenchus Approach. Actors were brought in to explore the way in which we interact and review our behaviour and performance with others. Having actors in to demonstrate behaviour and act as an interactive sounding board for our difficult conversations was another example of interactive methods to ensure effective learning outcomes. Peter Redstone and Jeff Welch built upon the personality profiling by adding to our communication skills, interacting with people and specifically the media, to ensure the way in which we deliver our message is positive and clear.

One of the stand out differences of the CRL course, compared to others I have attended, is the “Chatham House Rule” approach, meaning the course was a safe place for the participants and speakers to share the challenges and joys of life. The 15 speakers complimented the course objectives and was again a broad spectrum of people from within, as well as outside, the sphere of agriculture. All the speakers shared openly their journey to leadership, their motivators, identifying challenges, discussing decision making tools, work-life balance and generally how they managed their lives whilst reaching their goals. It was interesting to witness the different presentation styles of the speakers, some speakers used power point to varying degrees whilst others managed their time without props. Some of the speakers used humour, others had seemingly boundless energy, unwavering beliefs, convictions, openness and warmth whilst some used thought provoking questioning to convey their message. The importance of good oration skills and the use of body language to successfully engage with your audience can not be understated. Some of the main messages which were a common thread among the speakers and stayed with me were:

- sometimes there isn’t a good decision to be made, sometimes the decision is just “wicked”.
- the key to success is working hard and focusing whilst remaining positive and flexible to opportunities.

- Know your limits, accept you may not have all the skills you need, bring in the people you need to be successful.
- Book a regular appointment with yourself, ensure regular personal development.
- Make sure your “ladder” is on the correct wall, bring your special people with you on your journey, don’t get to the “top of your wall” and find you’ve lost what was special and important to you.

An element of the course that I found very rewarding and hugely beneficial was the presentation of the participants on the joys and challenges of their respective businesses and lives. For myself this was quite an emotional offering, given the multitude of changes and decisions that I am faced with. I watched my new friends share their joys and challenges and felt truly blessed to have the opportunity to develop skills and relationships with some truly remarkable individuals. During these sessions we were transported into their daily lives, gaining an understanding of their motivators, the challenges they faced and their hopes for the future. It is also a classic example of how prone we are as human beings to make assumptions or lack an appreciation of the complexities of the people we come across. The process of presenting our joys and challenges uncovered how extraordinary people are, sometimes without them even realising how remarkable they are.

I travelled to the leadership course with high hopes of learning some key decision making skills that I could apply to my personal, business and industry representation roles. It isn’t often that my expectations are met, let alone exceeded. The course structure, content and participants have enriched my life in such an incalculable way, for which I will be forever grateful. I would like to thank the Kelly family, through Nuffield Australia and the Lorna and Bert Kelly Memorial Award, Itravel Griffith and the Worshipful Company of Farmers for the financial contributions which enabled my participation in the course. Additionally I would like to thank Nuffield Australia for their continued investment in my personal development. To Richard and Geoff, thank you for your efforts and patience. To the 22nd CRL class of 2018, I could not have asked for a more supportive and interesting group of people to grow with, I have stars in my eyes. Lastly I would like to thank my wonderful family, particularly my children, for supporting yet another absenteeism from our lives and work.



Photo 9 & 10 – The beautiful Dartington Hall, Devon UK