

INFLUENCING LEADERS

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Abstract

The Institute of Agricultural Management Leadership course first ran in 2002. The two objectives were to improve the leadership qualities of existing leaders, and to give time to consider how a clear forward vision of the industry could be achieved.

The conclusions about leadership are that:

1. Leaders make things happen through other people.
2. Leaders must aggressively manage their time.
3. Leaders must have good communication skills.
4. What leaders do is more important than who they are.
5. Leaders need people to know that what they do is what they say.

The opportunities for the development of leadership in young people is reviewed and it is concluded that:

1. Young farmers Clubs should be used as a means of promoting agriculture to young people.
2. Young people should be mentored by experienced leaders.
3. The results contained in the Nuffield reports should be circulated more widely.
4. Leadership courses should be more widely promoted so that all young people can take advantage of them.

INFLUENCING LEADERS

This is an accelerating period of change for all sectors of agriculture that has continued to go faster and faster in recent years.

Food production is now only one of the many responsibilities of multifunctional agriculture. It is a necessity for the word agriculture to come to be recognised as an all embracing activity in rural areas. Alliston, (2000). A change of the present dimensions and at this speed means that Leadership is now more challenging and difficult than it has been for centuries.

One of the conclusions in the Nuffield Jubilee Report of 1998 was that the Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust would endorse the setting up of the Institute of Agricultural Management Leadership course to run in early 2002. Twelve leaders from within the agricultural industry spent three weeks in the UK and Europe, thinking about leadership and discussing issues.

1. Leadership characteristics

There were two objectives for the Leadership Course. Firstly to improve the leadership qualities of existing leaders, and secondly to give time to consider how a clear forward vision of the industry can be achieved.

It is clear that for leaders to be accepted three main elements are required:-

1. Substantiated fact behind what you say
2. Track record of success behind you
3. Credibility in what you say.

Robinson (2000)

Add to these four beliefs that are required of leaders:

1. A clear and compelling vision of our values and how we behave.
2. A clear understanding of how we contribute to society.
3. A commitment to engage with all those who have an interest in our activities.
4. A commitment to transparency so that people know we do what we say.

Watts, (2001)

Philip Watts the Chairman of the Managing Directors of Shell recently said "I should make absolutely clear that none of these contradict or ever could, the absolute requirement to be competitive and profitable. Without that we could contribute nothing to anybody". This applies to agriculture as much as it does to Shell.

Watts, (2001)

There is some evidence that leaders are both born and made. Watts (2001). Leadership is about having the right personal attitudes and attributes, motivating and engaging the commitment of others, building and maintaining a team that shares in a common vision and has similar values, standards, expectations and direction. Some of these skills can be taught and acquired. Ashworth (1998) Watts (2001).

So how were the leaders for the Leadership Course going to be selected? Well, it seemed sensible to give a simple list of some of the most likely traits required.

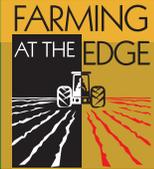
Before applying, candidates were asked to consider their own characteristics as judged against the following list.

- Judgement
- People skills
- Listening skills
- Discipline
- Ability to be articulate
- Charismatic personality
- Energy
- Evidence of general ability
- Evidence of prior leadership
- Willingness to serve.

Of the 52 people that applied for the course the majority had demonstrated most of these characteristics.

Incidentally, this list is appropriate to the many notable leaders associated with the Royal Agricultural College over the years. They have been governors, staff, and students, who have all been right for the circumstances in which they found themselves. People like Lord Bledisloe, a great ambassador, Professor Bobby Bouffour, a great technician and Lord

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Plumb of Coleshill who in his recent book the Plumb Line described himself as a "participator" who has a conviction that only by joining with others can one influence events and get things done. (Plumb, 2002).

Consideration of the educational system in the Royal Agricultural College shows an evolution that is recognising the need to develop these leadership skills in students. This is being done in a number of ways such as peer group presentations, more organisation of their own working schedules and practices, seminars and tutorials that improve people and listening skills, and deadlines that increase awareness of the benefits of self discipline. The aim is for students to leave the College with a portfolio of evidence as well as a personality that will make them stand out above the rest.

2. Selection

This then leads back to another objective of the Leadership Course. The intention was to take twelve people and bond them together in a way that would give them collectively more strength and power in the future than they would have as individuals now. The selection process was therefore extremely important and John Alvis acted as Chairman of the selection panel. John has a vast experience of selecting the Nuffield Scholars as well as a very participative inclusive management style for his own agricultural business. John Kerr also brought experience to the panel from outside of agriculture having been a past Chairman of Ipswich Town Football Club.

3. Time Management

The Leadership Course itself required a full three week commitment and therefore time management was an integral part of the delegates deliberations when applying. Several of the best known leaders in our industry in addressing the Course delegates referred to the issue of time management. Good leaders have to aggressively manage their time so that private activities (family activities) are given adequate priority and consideration. This may involve no contact to be made other than social contact on Sunday or for the whole weekend. Whether leaders are less effective by adopting this strategy was unclear but it is certainly necessary to give an acceptable lifestyle.

A Time Management Matrix might help with this:-

	Urgent	Non-urgent
Important	<p>1 Crises</p> <p>Deadline driven lectures/ projects/meetings</p> <p>Pressing problems</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Preparation Planning Relationship Building True recreation</p>
Not important	<p>3 Interruptions Some phone calls Some mail/reports</p>	<p>4 Trivia Junk Mail Some phone calls</p>



	Many popular activities	Time wasters Escape activities
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Covey et al., 1994

Most people act in quadrants one and three but the key activities in most of our lives are:

1. Improving communication with people
2. Better preparation
3. Better planning and organisation
4. Better personal care
5. Seizing new opportunities
6. Personal development

All of these are in Quadrant Two. They are not urgent. The objective therefore must be to move from Quadrant Three to Quadrant Two.

4. Teamwork

Returning to the Leadership Course theme: all the delegates were psychometrically tested beforehand. The results of these tests showed that they were spread through the categories.

Concluder/Producer 4,
 Thruster/Organiser 3,
 Explorer/Promotor 2,
 Controller/Inspector 1,
 Creator/Innovator 1,
 Assessor/Developer 1.

Given that groups have a greater depth of thought and a broader understanding of issues when a mix of types contribute, it was interesting that during the three weeks of the programme the delegates all harmonised well.

Neilson (2002)

Watts (2001) said: "Leadership is about making things happen through other people. Leadership is not about exercising individual will over others."

5. Communication Skills

Many of the delegates were good computer users and this enabled them to keep abreast of their businesses during their time away. Several had also taken part recently in media activities: radio, television or journalism. Leaders must have good communication skills.

"Churchill had the unique ability by words, phrases, stories, sentences and paragraphs to give hope to the weary, to give tenacity to those that seemingly had lost all hope. Words are powerful."

Clemmer and McNeil (1984).

6. Conclusions

1. Leaders make things happen through other people.
2. Leaders must aggressively manage their time.
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Leadership in Young People

Other opportunities are offered to individuals to help the development of leadership.

7. The National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs (YFC)

A fundamental need is to encourage the most able members of the school populations to come into agriculture. The Young Farmers Clubs have a vital role to play in this. Membership of this organisation starts at ten years of age, and is not restricted to those from a farming environment. Some urban youths enjoy the company of their rural peers. This then leads to "recruitment" for the future and at the same time they learn about country matters.

"YFCs are run by members for members and provide young people with a unique opportunity to enjoy a dynamic social life, develop skills, get involved with the local community, travel abroad and take part in a wide range of competitions at

county, regional and national level, including sports, crafts and life skills". National Federation of Young Farmers Club (2001). Their membership numbers 20,000 and through membership of the European Young Farmers Federation, UK delegates can gain access to EU Decision Makers.

8. Mentoring

During the Leadership Course the concept of mentoring was discussed on a number of occasions. Often leaders require reassurance before expressing a controversial or strong course of action. Strength can come from elder statesmen who listen and counsel but ultimately encourage. Such mentoring can give young leaders the feeling of power that is often required when putting forward individual beliefs.

The promotion of individuals into scholarships, jobs, industry review panels and representative body committees can also improve young leaders.

9. Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust

One of the most talked about development programmes for young people is the Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust. Each year, up to twenty Nuffield Farming Scholars go from the UK to study a wide range of topics throughout the world. Also some overseas Nuffields come to Europe. It was therefore a great experience for the Leadership Course delegates to meet with the incoming overseas Nuffield Scholars from Australia, New Zealand, Zimbabwe and France for a joint programme in Brussels. Their inputs into the debates ensured that the European view was not the only one being considered.

The quality of some of these reports is outstanding but it is a constant problem that many of the results are not reported more widely. Perhaps the Nuffield organisation should seek financial sponsorship that would be used specifically to fund the wider dissemination of the information.

10. The Institute of Agricultural Management Leadership Course

Returning to the Leadership Course, the course content included personal development, human resource management, risk management, change management, the importance of research, communications and the media, lobbying, public relations and the role of government and agricultural representative bodies.

One of the highlights of the Course was a combined session with delegates who were taking part in a Leadership Programme organised by the Windsor Leadership Trust. These delegates were specifically non-agricultural and the Princess Royal, Princess Anne chaired a combined debate about future agricultural leadership. The day was hosted by the Principal of the Royal Agricultural College. One of the best suggestions to come from this session was the need for the agricultural industry to lobby effectively across all political parties.

11. John Edgar Memorial Trust

Recently the Royal Agricultural College has been asked to take on the running of the John Edgar Memorial Trust Rural Development Course. This course covers such topics as managing people, business practice, marketing, media management, leadership and diversification. The Trust provides funds for 12 delegates who will be farmers' sons and daughters, farm managers and assistants or other people involved in agriculture, horticulture or land-based management in the English southern counties. John Edgar was a famous Hampshire farmer, an advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture, and Vice Chairman of the Hampshire Cattle Breeders Society.

The expected age of these delegates will be 25 to 35 years old.

There are two other courses not associated with the RAC which develop leadership skills. These are firstly:

12. The Seale Hayne Worshipful Company of Farmers - The Challenge of Rural Leadership Course.

An intensive two week course designed for farmers, managers and those in related industries who wish to extend their business, strategic and logical skills. It is suitable for those of age 25 to 50 years who wish to develop their skills to benefit both themselves, their business and the industry.

13. The Worshipful Company of Farmers advanced course in agricultural business management at Imperial College at Wye, University of London

This course is a three week intensive residential course for mid-career managers of businesses in the agricultural industry. The average age for the course is late thirties.

All of these courses are substantially subsidised by industry and charities and yet from time to time some fail to attract applicants of suitable calibre. Publicity and promotion are essential if young leaders are going to take advantage of all the opportunities open to them.

14. Conclusions

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6. Young people should be mentored by experienced leaders.
7. The results contained in the Nuffield reports should be circulated more widely.
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People are asking what is the future for agriculture? What is clear is that it will not be like the past and what is also clear is that it will require strong leaders. But if you aspire to become one of these - be warned! It takes courage. Sir Peter Elworthy, the President of the Federation of Farmers took a great deal of personal abuse at the time of the abolition of subsidies in New Zealand.

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