

December 2015

TEPAP Course – Report by 2012 Scholar Mark Swift

“Parkes Plains”
PO Box 333
PARKES NSW 2870

This report outlines my participation in the TEPAP Course in Texas, USA, in January 2015.

I have been in correspondence with my sponsors Tony and Dawn Kelly both prior and post the tour to thank them and inform them of the wonderful opportunity that this scholarship offered. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my gratitude to the Kelly's for their generous sponsorship of the TEPAP scholarship. This opportunity has been invaluable to me personally and I hope they will continue to offer this opportunity to future returning scholars.

Chontell Giannini and the team from Itravel at Griffith also require special thanks for their very kind sponsorship and organisation of my journey from Parkes to Austin. This contribution is significant both in financial terms and time saved by me personally. The course falls at very busy time of year in our business and their service provided a great piece of mind that I hadn't overlooked key details. The service Itravel provide to Nuffield Scholars is outstanding and does make the travelling experience far easier for us all whilst on our studies.

These thanks are extended to Nuffield Australia for facilitating this scholarship. This course has been a terrific opportunity to assist with developing my financial literacy, which is important following the array of business opportunities that the Nuffield program puts before its scholars. Many of these opportunities are very enticing but are not necessarily appropriate for every environment, market or business. TEPAP has assisted in grounding my expectations as to what is achievable.

The TEPAP course is a very intense seven days and fortunately for me, came at a good time in my life and career. The course was a timely refresher of my undergraduate studies at Marcus Oldham College; I appreciated that I was not using the suite of skills I had learnt at college to their full effect. This was something I was consciously going to rectify following the publishing of my Nuffield paper. The timing was serendipitous as I received a phone call from Tim Hutchins (1983 Sch) in the departure lounge of Sydney airport informing me that I my paper was complete. The sense of relief was overwhelming as Tim and I had been toing and froing for nearly 18 months.

The highlights from the course and trip were succession planning, personality profiling, the network of producers and a short visit I took to the Mississippi delta following the trip.

The succession planning discussion was a breath of fresh air. In Australia the discussion typically focusses on asset transfer which is more appropriate for estate planning. There is rarely any consideration given for the continuation of the business and how management will succeed between generations. The course highlighted the importance of these as two separate issues that needed to be dealt with concurrently. This line of discussion on succession has allowed for me to take a more confident approach in broaching this issue within our business which is providing improved clarity and certainty for all stakeholders.

The personality profiling was excellent; I have become very jaded about this process after having been through it close to ten times in the last 12 years. This experience however provided clarity and was communicated in such a way that the pieces of my personality and those around me became understandable. It has allowed me to be more effective in managing my character traits to enhance the useful and temper the problematic. It has also allowed me to better identify and communicate with the range of personalities both within our business and with our service providers. It is a process that requires awareness and practice to remain effective, a skill I am far from mastering.

The group of producers was something to behold. Most producers grew corn and beans in the Midwest which was not unexpected. However there was quite a range of other producers who ranged from fresh market vegetables, to processing potatoes, cotton to cattle and accountants and bankers. The age group ranged from early twenties to late fifties and business turnover ranged from a hundred thousand to nearly a hundred million. This diverse group offered a range of discussion topics and allowed insight into how people managed their particular circumstance. This allowed a gauge to be developed of where my international competitors were, what was occupying their thoughts and put our business into a global context.

The Nuffield program was also of particular interest to many participants. One evening in the post dinner discussion forums that are part of the course I was asked to speak on what Nuffield was, what I had done and the impact it had had on me personally. This was a humbling experience and allowed me to open up the conversation with these producers about the Eisenhower Fellowship and our involvement with them. When I return this year I will be doing my best to inform the group of the new Nuffield International Scholarship program.

I had allowed some time following the course to see what opportunities would come up and I'm grateful for doing so and for my Nuffield experience for giving me the confidence to do so. One the course attendees Nicolas O'Neal from Greenwood, Mississippi, invited me to visit his home. This allowed to me make a very good friend, meet his family, see his business and experience a part of the world that I hadn't visited but had always wanted to. The hospitality in this region is fantastic and the culture is something to behold, with the rich and chequered history I count myself fortunate to get a local perspective.

I would like to thank Tony and Dawn Kelly, Itravel and Nuffield Australia again for this opportunity; it has been a great way to continue my education post-Nuffield and has allowed me to improve my management in both human resources and financial literacy.

I appreciate that for our family business to succeed we will require a certain degree of luck, but education of this kind will reduce our dependence on its fickle nature. My family agree and have seen the value of this course and are sending me back for unit two in the summer. I hope this opportunity will be available into the future for other scholars. It has added capacity into our business and has in many ways given me a new project post Nuffield to occupy my time and thoughts. For me personally with my new found awareness of my personality traits I believe this has been most important in limiting the post Nuffield blues.

Sincerest regards
Mark Swift
2012 Nuffield Scholar