

**The Worshipful Company of Farmers and Duchy
College**

Challenge of Rural Leadership

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The Challenge of Rural Leadership

Early on in the 2010 Nuffield experience, this course “The Challenge of Rural Leadership” in the UK was briefly mentioned. It catches the attention of all the new scholars as something that could be a unique experience. I am not sure who pulled out to open a position for myself but it was exciting to be given the opportunity to participate in such a highly recommended course.

Thank you to Duchy College particularly Richard Soffe for accepting my late entry, Jim Geltch for the call up and The Worshipful Company of Farmers for assisting with the costs of attending the course.



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Introduction

In November 2010 I had the great privilege of participating in the “Challenge of Rural Leadership” course ran by the Duchy College for the Worshipful Company of Farmers in the UK. The course is set on the spectacular estate of Dartington Hall in South Devon UK, a truly inspirational learning environment. Nearly two of the fullest weeks of activities, presentations and challenges one can conjure.

There were 19 participants including myself, as the only one outside of the European Union, with one other from Poland, two from the Isle of Man and the remaining majority from the UK. The very busy course agenda was structured around three main sessions a day with a key note speaker or activity assigned to one of those sessions. Reflection began at 8:30am with the official start of the day at 9:00am. With one hour assigned for lunch we worked until 6:00pm, for what was usually an exceptional meal break, before resuming for our evening session until around 10:00pm.

The course followed an impeccable timetable that was self governed by two of the course members each day. Apart from ensuring a tight time schedule was kept, a thoughtful introduction and gift were to be arranged for our guest presenters.

Presentations

Week 1

- Kevin Leavey, CEO, Cornwall Unitary Authority
- Gwyn Jones, Vice Chairman, NFU
- Mel Hall, Regional Director, NFU South West
- Philip Lymbery, CEO, Compassion in World Farming
- Professor Allan Buckwell, Policy Director, CLA
- The Right Hon. Jim Paice MP, Minister for Agriculture
- Helen Ashcroft & Helen Thoday, former CRL Students
- Professor Mick Fuller, University of Plymouth
- Colonel Bryan Watters, University of Cranfield

Week 2

- Martin Warren, Conductor
- Chris Graf Grote, Director, Spearhead
- Mike Seymour, Director, Seymour Williams Associates
- Jeff Welch, TV Presenter
- Jane King, Editor, Farmers Weekly
- Peter Redstone, Partner, Barefoot Thinking Partnership
- Rachel Vowles, Director, Playing Dead

Gillie Stoneham, Director, Actor Factor

This list was a privilege to observe, when the UK minister of Agriculture presents as a guest it resonates the magnitude of the course. Jim Paice MP was certainly the highlight and it was great to see UK agriculture in good hands. The recent change of government has brought a strong custodian for the farmers to the forefront; his level headed approach is particularly important to current CAP reform and the ever shrinking budget for agriculture.

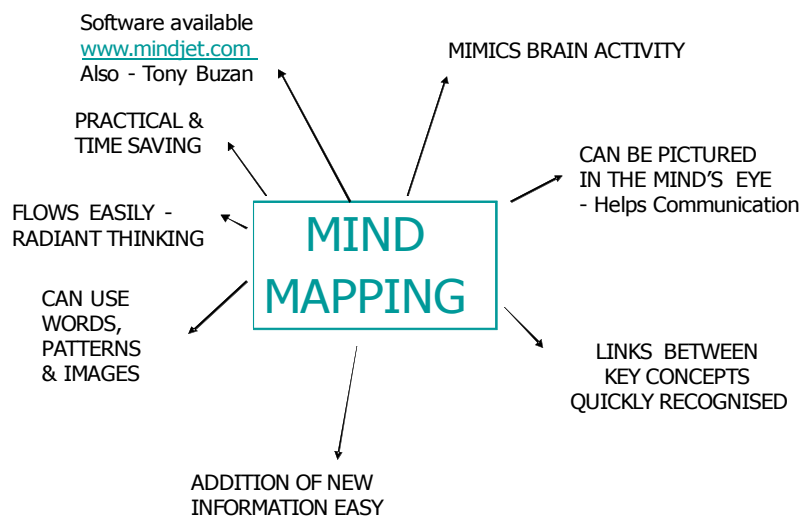
Philip Lymbery the CEO of Compassion in World Farming, I found to be a very interesting. Agree or not with the man's message the way he goes about job is impeccable. As host for the evening of his presentation, I enjoyed my first ever vegetarian meal ordered in a restaurant. Our group was a tough crowd in regards to his plight, however no one could disagree with his talent as a communicator.

Fantastic presentations such as these couple with great visits to Riverford Organics (the largest organic retailer in Europe) and Buckfast Abby with Martin Warren for music as a metaphor. In conjunction with facilitators Richard Soffe and Peter Redstone formed a platform for personal growth.

Some of the lessons I have learnt and now use are reflected in this very brief summary of the 2010 Challenge of Rural Leadership.

Practical Tools

Extrapolating ideas or sifting through a problem can cause a great deal of frustration and ultimately equate to wasted time. Peter Redstone is a management consultant from Barefoot partnerships with a special interest in food, farming and sustainable development. His motto of helping people “innovate and deliver change to meet their goals - quickly, sustainably and effectively”. Proved to be a great facilitator in helping us overcome our immediate tasks as well as practical techniques for everyday life. Concepts such as mind mapping in combination with his decision matrix demonstrated a good method for getting started on a task.



1. **A Mind Map** is a diagram used to represent words & ideas arranged radically around central key words (Peter Redstone 2010)

PMI

Plus	Minus	Interesting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill in each column in turn – starting with Plus • Frame and repeat questions like – ‘what would be good about...’ ‘and what else?’ • Accept all ideas, they can be prioritized later • Stay with this column as long as you can! Typically we find it harder to identify ‘P’s than ‘M’s! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only move onto ‘Minus’ when you have really finished with the ‘Plus’ • Again, accept and write up all ideas! It rapidly reduces creativity if ideas are criticized as soon as they are aired. • Use OPV to help generate more ideas (mind map – ‘who has an interest here?’ ‘what might be their point of view?’) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add ‘Interesting’ points whenever they arise • Often they contain really valuable ideas which you can develop further.

PMI is a Thinking Tool devised by Edward de Bono (www.edwdebono.com). Although deceptively simple, this tool was suitable for our group work as well as expanding an individual issue at work.

Myers Briggs

Human Metrics is a fantastic tool which enables an individual to understand the way they interact with others as well as the way we perceive and deal with an issue or incident. Gillie Stoneham introduced the Myers Briggs theory in personality profiling. Everyone can be profiled by fitting into 1 option of each of the four categories.

1. E= Extraversion or Introversion = I
2. S = Sensing or Intuiting = I
3. T = Thinking or Feeling = F
4. J = Judging or Perceiving = P

A simple four letter answer, basically outlining your personality in one 16 different categories. There is no better or worse category, nor one that results in creation of a better leader, with each having strengths and weaknesses. It merely offered us a background in personality preferences helping to appreciate individual difference. In practical sense this has helped in dealings with my family and employees in the working environment. For example helping myself with an appreciation in understanding why my father won't try something.

Communication

Jeff Welch, a former TV Presenter, injected some serious energy into the course as facilitator for media training. First impressions are everything, "People will forget 80% of what you say, but remember what you looked like", Jeff Welch (2010). Jeff made vast improvements in our ability to address the media in a very short period of time focusing on public speaking with an importance in appearance with a clear simple message.

Simple techniques displayed to us included remembering the interviewers name and using it when answering a question if you need time to think of the correct answer. Smiling, nodding and holding your hands together so as not to use them in expression or to fidget.

We undertook three interviews the first two were vastly different simulated face to face television interviews. One being an ambush style interview where the interviewer purposely pushes you into a corner with a negative slant on your answers. The other a more peaceful chat with a chance to voice your story with the identified three key points. The third being a down the line interview with no reporter in sight.

One take home message I have already found very useful, whenever attending an event where there is any chance you could be asked to speak to the media, is to have three key points prepared to convey a clear message on the subject matter.

Rachel Vowels from the Northcott Theatre Company is one of the first faces you meet at the beginning of the course. Rachel had the task of breaking the ice, it was simply amazing that we all knew each other in one hour including learning a secret about one another. There was more to come from Rachel and the talented team of actors she assembled. The course was treated to a very special evening being part of a murder mystery. It truly was a culture shock, but an extremely entertaining show.

One of Rachel's more serious tasks was to coordinate role playing sessions. Our class broke into three small groups where an actor presented us with a real life situation, which we in turn had to try and resolve. My challenge was as a family mediator, try and resolve a situation between two half brother on their family farm. It had been run as a dairy but not going particularly well although that all one brother knew how to do. The second brother had just recently returned with many new ideas on how to turn profitability around. A great task for challenging yourself to think on your feet.

The Balcony



CRL class of 2010 "bustling on the dance floor"

Understanding the big picture was consistently highlighted with strong importance. The object of this was to remove yourself from the busy 'dance floor' more commonly the hustle and bustle of day to day life. 'To keep your eye on the prize' is another way to describe the metaphor, don't be blindsided by the immediate task at hand. As I am sure everyone finds themselves stuck in the mould from time to time.

The valuable time of removing yourself to the 'balcony' to reflect and maintain focus was constantly reiterated. The task sounds so simple, but takes strong organisation and persistence to continually take time for reflection as well as to implement change. After returning it has been a challenge to pin down a clear direction, due to the hectic nature of our harvest. However, I am looking forward to our first real analysis with family to ensure we have a clear vision.



Richard Soffe 2010

Balance

I particularly enjoyed a session towards the end as part of the course reflection with Richard Soffe. He presented us with a simple self assessment tool, a metaphor of the 'wheel of life', as illustrated above. We were asked to rate out of 10 our level of satisfaction for each of the six categories. Helping in addressing personal development by maintaining a healthy work – life balance. As someone who is deeply engrossed in building a business as well as starting a family, I found that there were some imperfections that need addressing to make my wheel turn smoothly!



Richard Soffe 2010

Conclusion

Initially I found it hard to get comfortable in the course due to the fact that at home we were deeply entrenched in the peak of our production season. After settling in around the fourth day of the course, one of my neighbours during reflection time, questioned the merit of some of the activities we had been doing. He asked when the lessons of leadership were going to be taught. It was in those words that triggered my appreciation for what was unfolding in the course. There is no perfect model to adopt in relation to exactly how to lead or an exact answer for a particular problem. The course offered lessons in personally critiquing oneself. Understanding more about who we are and how we deal with certain situations. Improving self-awareness to help prepare and deal with the perplexities of individual challenges. Personally I found the course to be a very refreshing, character building slap in the face.

I would highly recommend the “Challenges of Rural leadership” course to anybody who is offered the opportunity. The course has instantly changed the way I go about certain tasks from subtle changes in the way I deal with family members and employees, to bigger picture issues in relation to my involvement in industry. It was a chance to step back and analyse myself and my business with the unique opportunity of 18 new friends’ comfortably offering constructive criticism. Scary but an amazing feeling!



CRL class of 2010, spending some time on 'The Balcony'