



AUSTRALIAN
RURAL
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
LEADING THE WAY

Australian Rural Leadership Program

JAMES HOULAHAN



Course 10

FINAL REPORT

Sponsor

Cotton Research and Development Corporation

Cotton

RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND AND PROFILE

James Houlahan:

- 43 years old
- Married to Lauren and two boys, Callum and Hudson
- 'Tuscany' Moree, NSW
- Beef producer.

Managing Partner of HOULAHAN SAFETY CONSULTANTS, a rural-based business serving Australian farming and regional industry with practical solutions to OHS problems.

Formal qualifications:

- 2004 Master of Science & Technology (OHS). UNSW
- 2004 Bachelor of Commerce (enrolled) UNE
- 2003 Cert' IV Workplace Trainer/ Assessor
- 1995 Graduate Certificate in Management. CSU
- 1989 Diploma Occupational Health and Safety Management. NSCA
- 1979 Certificate in Agriculture. 'Tocal' Agricultural College

Other relevant qualifications, professional development and training

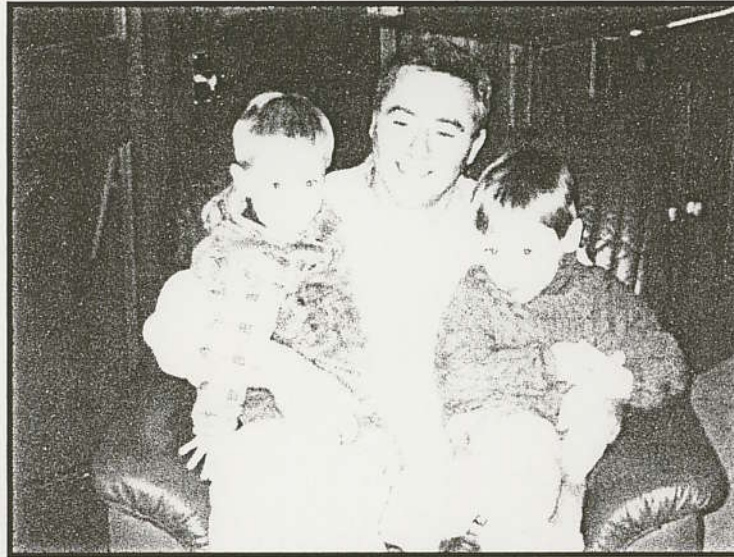
- Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems (Auditors Course) UNSW and QSA
- Environmental Management Systems (BMP Auditors Course) CRDC and QSA
- Occupational Health & Safety Consultation (Trainers Course) NSW Workcover
- Occupational Health & Safety Employee Induction (Trainers Course) NSW Workcover
- Farm Chemical User Training (NSW Chemcert Trainer) Chemcert Australia
- Managing Farm Safety (Instructors Course) Farmsafe Australia
- Hearing Conservation and Noise Control. Worksafe Australia

Professional memberships:

- NSW Farmers Association- Producer Member
- Safety Institute of Australia- Member
- Asia Pacific Extension Network- Member

Previous positions held and selected past achievements: (87 to Dec' 28th 2003)

- Deputy Director of the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety
 - Director of Safety Extension Programs
 - Manager National Farm Safety Training Centre
- Co-author of the industry endorsed and nationally accredited "Managing Farm Safety" training program.
- Churchill Fellowship (1993) overseas study of farm health and safety extension programs USA. (sponsor: Swires Group)



My experience and background has been mostly working with rural industries to promote and foster improved levels of health and safety and reduce the hazards and risks associated with life and work in agriculture.

Together with my wife Lauren, a local police officer at the Moree Station, we live with our two young boys Callum 6 and Hudson 4 on our property 'Tuscany' 20 kms west of Moree on the Watercourse Road.

When I'm not involved in the challenges of grazing cattle, the majority of my work time is preoccupied with managing my rural OHS consulting business. Houlahan Safety Consultants prides itself on providing practical and sustainable solutions to OHS problems confronting primary producers. Our mission statement is:

"To enhance the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of rural and regional Australia through improved performance in safety risk management"

What was my desire to participate in the Australian Rural Leadership Program

I believe that I have a clear and optimistic vision for the future of rural Australia and a realistic appreciation of my key leadership strengths and weaknesses. I have always been willing and eager to learn from the Australian rural leadership program and keen to share the experiences and perspectives of the other program participants.

My existing rural community and industry leadership roles had been at both local and national levels. I believed that I would make a significant contribution to the program by sharing my wide experiences in working with rural communities and rural industry groups in addressing key economic, social and technological issues through research and development projects with practical and profitable outcomes.

Amongst my desires in undertaking the ARLP was to enhance my networking and strategic partnership capacity and to further develop the tools to lead rural industries to defining best practice workplace health and safety standards and to assist rural communities towards realizing their longer-term aspirations.

I saw the ARLP as the best option for providing me a unique opportunity to further develop my leadership effectiveness and be exposed to other rural community leaders with a shared vision for stronger more prosperous rural communities.

Lessons and skills learnt from the Australian Rural Leadership Program

Any preconceived expectations of what might be in store for me in terms of my personal and professional development as a participant in the ARLP have now been proven to be a huge underestimation of the true worth of this program.

Amongst my very early learnings with the ARLP was the importance of better knowing who 'I' really am and more clearly understanding what influences my values, beliefs and shapes my aspirations for family, professionally and for the community at large.

I appreciate far more the need for diversity of opinion. That diversity is essential for change and growth. In my own organization I have helped to initiate diversity programs, generally orientated towards embracing social tolerances between different ethnic and gender groups. While this is on its own an essential first step, more could be done to develop our organization so that it truly values rather than fears different viewpoints.

Leaders, I have learnt need to promote the understanding that the cross-fertilization of opinion is the catalyst for generating innovation thinking and approaches. From the ARLP I have learnt to be more encouraging, supportive and recognizing of my fellow staffers and other professional peers to actively engage them and giving them greater freedom to come up with ideas and processes that may be different from mine, yet still meet our strategic direction for improving farm productivity through enhanced health and safety performance

Like many of my fellow Course 10 participants, and I suspect other graduates of the ARLP, the Kimberley session continues to provide me with a critical point of reference. Of immense benefit was being able to observe the leadership styles of other course participants and encouraged to provide feedback to them, as well as receiving peer constructive feedback on my own leadership behaviours and feeling uninhibited to try out new leadership behaviours.

The importance of both giving and receiving feedback on one's leadership behaviour has been well understood from my Kimberley session and I now consciously try to provide and seek this amongst my own peers.

Among the key learnings from the Kimberley session, in particular from the discussion with the traditional owners has been, as fellow Australians walking through and sharing the beauty of their land, I came to learn from this experience that making decisions from the heart is more important than making them from the mind.

Using all your senses to be able to stand on the outside and look in. Listen first; so that you may understand people and their situation, and not always expecting them to instantly understand you. The ARLP has helped me to value that it is only when you take the time to do this that you are able to see the true picture. Giving people the opportunity and time to express their opinion.

I make a much more conscious effort now to slow down and listen to others and encourage their input. Conversely, I also need to be more assertive at times and not allow myself to feel too pressured to make a quick decision when I believe I haven't all the necessary information.

The Kimberley session in particular, has given me the opportunity to reflect and give greater consideration to the decision making processes. It is important that we give ourselves time and room to think and not feel pressed to make a decision right now.

Experiencing both the natural and cultural beauty of the Kimberley and its people has left an indelible impression on me. The traditional owners of our land have much to teach us about caring for our country and community. I recall our meeting with the traditional owners on "Mount Pierre Station" and the comment that indigenous people... "live IN the country , not On it"...

As our syndicate walked blindfolded through the Gullaroo Gorge, it was not until we lifted the blindfold that we truly captured and felt in our hearts, the beauty of what lay beneath us. I am confident that the learning we have taken from here can be used in our everyday lives regardless of where we are walking.

The ARLP provides a unique opportunity to explore and try out leadership styles, which are not necessarily your own "natural style". You are in a safe environment to challenge any pre-existing paradigms and the opportunity to share with fellow ARLP participants about their experiences, their approaches and tools used in their settings. It is sometimes difficult to discuss issues within your industry or organisation and be provided with confidential, honest feedback, which you can work with.

For each of the sessions we have been provided with exposure to various leaders of industry and prominent public figures, including insights into many key issues they face and the methods they employ to implement organizational or structural change.

Among the leadership experiences I have been exposed to and/or have had opportunities to develop have been related to:

- Responsibility & courage
- Honesty & Integrity
- Effective person leads to effective leader (requires courage)
- Internal reflection, relationship management
- Being true to own convictions
- Personal principles
- Check your assumptions
- Grey Brigade linking up with youth in community as a mentor
- Balancing act – become ineffective if personal life not catered for.
- Learning from our children
- Making hard decisions – living with consequences
- When to fight and when to withdraw
- Building bridges in a relationship
- The value of effective partnerships with industry and key stakeholders.
- The importance of listening to understand, before you can expect to be understood.
- It's impossible to discover new oceans without the courage to lose sight of the shore.
- Why tell a lie when the truth will do.
- Lighting the fire is easy, it's how you manage the blaze afterwards that matters.
- The soft skills are the hard skills.



My understanding of a range of both national and international issues that impact on rural/ regional Australia has also been greatly enhanced. These have included issues relating to:

- Companies/ Organisations and their approaches to leadership and managing the triple bottom line;
- Native title;
- Environmental management and Conservation
- Rural investment
- The world economy and impacts from globalisation; and
- Multiculturalism

James Houlahan

Australian Rural Leadership Program, Course 10 Recipient – Final Report 12th November 2004

The personal growth dimensions of the ARLP have allowed me to identify and consider much more critically those areas of my life, both professionally and personal that may be either incongruous with what I see as my personal vision or otherwise where I need to develop capacity to be more effective as a rural leader. Among the more practical learnings that I have taken from the ARLP have included:

- Personality types and how best to work with each type
- Media training and public relations
- Executive health and well-being
- Negotiation and conflict resolution

While I may not have necessarily altered my values, I have reassessed them. They relate to: Honesty, Openness, Integrity, Respect and Fun.

While I still haven't totally solved the matter of balancing one's life, I am now much more conscious of not allowing the family relations to be compromised as a result of my personal professional crusades. I have an extremely supportive and tolerant partner, however, I don't want her to ever feel that she is taken for granted. Other ARLP participants also acknowledge that it's not always easy to ensure that your partner feels that they too are part of your journey for personal and professional growth.

Applying the learnings

I wish to work with others who share a common optimistic vision for rural communities and help inspire rural communities to strive to identify opportunities to develop the strategic alliances and strong partnerships with governments and across industry to foster renewed growth in our economic base and to foster a climate of opportunity for more jobs, better regional services and improved wellbeing.

My strong interest in promoting innovation adoption has me currently participating on a steering committee to progress a proposal for a National Centre for Innovation in Narrabri.

I aim to assist rural industries to identify and embrace innovative and practical solutions for improving agriculture's profitability through enhanced safety risk management that can be implemented at the farm level.

Assisting organizations such as the NSW Farmers Association and Cotton Australia to improve the integration of OHS standards into other relevant on-farm quality assurance initiatives continues to be a particular passion and interest of mine.

I will continue to also look for opportunities to work collaboratively with other community, industry and agency stakeholders to establish networks for supporting rural

communities and rural industry groups to develop their own capacity to address health and safety and other challenges.

The ARLP has shown me just how easy it can be to ignore opposing or alternate opinions/ views simply because they do not relate to how you may see the world. But now I much better understand and appreciate why it is so important to examine one's personal values and beliefs, and to develop that greater self-awareness to know truly where you are coming from in making decisions that often have wide reaching impact on other people.

At a more personal level, there has probably been no greater effect from my learning's than that on my interaction with my own family and community. My two young boys represent rural Australia's bright and prosperous future. In a practical way I am looking to get more involved in supporting local/ regional or even national initiatives aimed towards supporting our young people. The Moree Aboriginal Employment Strategy is one key initiative that I hope to provide practical support to.

I am also currently participating on two local/regional initiatives that are driving economic development through innovation adoption and commercialization.

A very important take home message from my participation in the ARLP and which I try hard to apply is to reward people who "have a go", and celebrate it, even if things don't pan out. Rural and regional Australia has no shortage of individuals who have the passion and interest to drive our spirited communities. What has been too often lacking, however, is the encouragement and support that programs like the ARLP do offer.

What the ARLP has provided me and every other past participant has been the knowledge, skills and confidence to help lead rural communities to achieve their collective aspirations, and evidenced by:

- Able to manage change
- Shared responsibility & governance – equal responsibility
- Effectively utilising diversity
- Empowers participation
- Community of choice
- Healthy succession planning for sustainability/self reliance
- Caring/sharing environment
- Belong/ownership identity
- Safe to articulate one's views and opinions
- Vibrant industries and healthy community

The ARLP has been both a real challenge and an incredible learning opportunity. The interactions between current and past ARLP participants, program speakers and informal discussions over dinner with industry, government and community leaders has given me knowledge, skills, confidence and a range of new tools to seek out and establish strategic alliances and explore more opportunities to strengthen our rural communities social structures and economic base.

I wish to thank the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation and especially my sponsor the Cotton Research and Development Corporation for this wonderful opportunity to participate in this world class leadership development program and reaffirm my commitment to leading and serving rural Australia towards realizing their aspirations for a healthy, prosperous future.

Yours sincerely,

James Houlahan

Managing Partner- Houlahan Safety Consultants

10th November 2004