

**Australian Rural Leadership Program
Course 12 – Final Report**

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This report is aimed at presenting the effect that the ARLP has had on my life, the changes it has driven in me and the consequences this will have on the people that I interact with.

The mid term report documented a couple of impacts that the Kimberley component had on my life and leadership style. In summary they were never assume you have all the information you may require and don't form opinions in haste but rather gather more information. These are both areas that I continue to work on and develop.

One of the large impacts of this course on my life that needs to be stated up front is my change of employment. Barely a session of the ARLP passed without reference to the issue of 'work life balance' and for me this was a real issue. With a lot of travel for work in my previous employment and my family left at home with no family support it was something that I needed to address.

After much thought, and with the support of my sponsors – Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Auscott and Cotton Seed Distributors – I changed employment from Bayer CropScience to Westpac. My new job sees me home a lot more in the evenings and back on the farm during the day, spending most of my time talking with farmers – both changes that I have appreciated.

I believe that one of the major effects the ARLP has had on me is its steering of my focus on the importance of relationships with others and the work I need to do in this area – no doubt this will be a theme in this report. In many ways this is what leadership is all about however never before have I actually stopped and focused on the issues.

The Ford factory in Melbourne is one example. At this location I was able to appreciate first hand what is done to accommodate the way different people operate. Here is a company that has over 60 different nationalities represented on the factory floor many with English as a second language.

Prior to going to going to this factory I hadn't given much thought to the issues that leadership faces when trying to get many people of different backgrounds (cultural or otherwise) working together. For me this was more of a subconscious process and when I was bringing different people together I never gave much consideration on how the interactions may work prior to the event. This is now something I now spend time on prior to a meeting/event that I am leading.

This of course ties in with the Meyers Briggs session that we had in Adelaide where we looked at how people think and the differences between them. It was a fascinating incite into why people do the things they do. I am the sort of person that deals in logical facts, interacts with others and then makes a decision and gets on with the task. I have to recognise that not all people are like this and working with them requires patience and understanding on my part. This is something that I now actively think about and practice.

The focus on social issues and responsibility (Sydney session) was a session I thoroughly enjoyed. Much of this is an area that is not foreign to me as I have done street work in my teenage years, however the presentations by the different mission workers was beneficial as it gave me a lot deeper appreciation of the issues on the street right through to the political level.

One of the initial thoughts I had coming away from the Sydney session was the fact that it is vital being a leader that clear decisions are made in a timely fashion (this was drawn from both witnessing the social issues and hearing of the lack of government leadership in this area, and also listening to the account of climbing Mt Everest with no oxygen supplies).

As I don't have any issues making decisions I then explored other applications for me. I realised is that in leadership I need to focus on 'who are the decisions that I make going to effect, and have I told them?' In leading others and making decisions it is important that the ramifications of the decision being made are explored as much as possible.

While personally not specifically interested in the beef industry there were learnings from this part of the course related to industry structure as a whole. The beef industry in Australia is not without its challenges and the issue that probably stood out for me the most, in amongst a lot of other information, was that it is important that an industry shows a united front and clear voice on issues.

I found it disappointing that the beef industry could not convey clearly and concisely what parameters are in place to negate the threat of disease – the largest threat to our market. There are clearly a number of initiatives in this area that the beef industry is working on however I found this information 'lost' in amongst other issues being discussed.

Traveling to Brazil certainly reinforced the advantages of the isolation of the Australian herd and the superior genetics however Brazil is an agricultural powerhouse just waiting to get going. We need to be prepared for this and open to the idea that we may not be the 'best in the world' when it comes to beef production.

More specifically, in Brazil I probably learnt the most from the management team at CFM Farms (a property owned by the British based Vestey Family). The

leadership here was very much a 'no nonsense' and 'no emotion' style with decisions made on logic and economics alone. It was here that I also started to think more about the importance of having a strong support of capable people around you to support you in your leadership – an issue that I then realized was a common theme in successful leaders that we communicated with through the course.

Finally the role of government and its 'ever reaching influence'. I have always appreciated that we are fairly isolated here in Australia from the rest of the world and this was once again reinforced by our travel to Brazil. For me the international relationships between countries are fascinating and I enjoyed the opportunity to learn and discuss more about these. The extension to this was learning about the actions of Government in Canberra and their influence in how our country operates.

Ironically it is this 'big picture' concept that relates back to one of my key development areas from this course – seek first to understand, before being understood. I think often decisions are made at a high level and industries or individuals are quick to pass judgment. When this happens I know personally I need to step back and think about the decision, why perhaps the politicians opted that way, and who is going to be effected.

Throughout the duration of the ARLP I found my friendships with other course participants strengthening. After each session I found myself reflecting on the time I had spent with my colleagues and the things that I had learnt while spending time with them. Discussions around managing staff, proposing/dealing with difficult issues and working with the media were all topics that I chatted to course colleagues with on an informal basis. It was some of this time that I found most beneficial with outcomes from conversations often guiding my actions upon my return to work.

Consequently the ARLP has been a wonderful journey for me and a period packed with ideas that I can apply in my day-to-day life. I have a much greater awareness of those around me and how my actions effect them, as well as a greater appreciation of government, media and the necessity to search for facts. I have benefited enormously from this Program and I trust that this report conveys this feeling.

I fully appreciate the opportunity I have had to participate in such a Program and hence I extend my thanks to my sponsors, Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Auscott and Cotton Seed Distributors. I particularly am grateful that they continued to support me as I moved away from cotton. The cotton industry of Australia is fortunate to possess such organisations that see the value in 'grooming' young leaders to tackle rural issues.

My aim is to be involved in the cotton industry in Australia again in the future, perhaps as part of my 'extra curricular activities', when the right opportunity presents itself. It would be great to put some of my leadership learnings into practice at some level within the Australian cotton industry.

In conclusion I want to list six key messages I took away from one session we had specifically on leadership that I found quite constructive and am aiming to put into my everyday thoughts:

1. Plan, Plan, Plan
2. Make sound and timely decisions
3. Understand strengths and weaknesses
4. Lead by example
5. Keep your team informed
6. Consequences are real

Many thanks to my sponsors, Rob Patrick and the Australian Rural Leadership Program for this wonderful opportunity.