



COURSE 21 FINAL REPORT

BY

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Introduction

My current role is as a scientist with CSIRO Agriculture based at the Australian Cotton Research Institute in Narrabri. I lead a team of researchers, technicians, students and trainees that study resistance in *Helicoverpa* spp. to Bt-cotton. I am a long-standing member of the Bt Technical Panel of the Cotton Australia Transgenic and Insect Management Strategies Committee which develops, reviews and oversees the industry's pre-emptive strategies for managing resistance to Bt-cotton. I also lead a project that aims to develop education capacity in agriculture. These roles have not changed since submitting my mid-term report in November 2014.

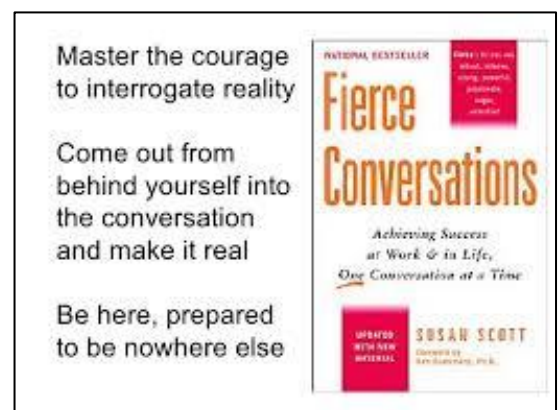
Highlights of and lessons from the program

The beginnings of my key lessons about leadership were firmly sewn in the Kimberley session and reinforced and grown during each of the subsequent sessions. Whilst they are inextricably linked, I present the highlights by broad category.

Diversity: By studying the styles of different day leaders throughout the program I learned to recognise and appreciate different ways of leading to achieve the same endpoint. For me, this was as much learning about the value of diverse thinking as it was about recognising different ways to influence. Consequently, I'm now not only more observant to different ways of leading but also better able to adapt my style of leadership to respond to situations that require different approaches to be effective.

Awareness: It's a rare privilege to have 30 of Australia's future leaders share the intimate detail of how past experiences have shaped their current lives. Through hearing these personal stories, as well as sharing my own, I have a deeper appreciation of what drives different motivations, values, and goals in others, as well as better understanding of the same in myself. Consequently I find myself being more tolerant of different ways of thinking as well as better understanding not only my own responses to situations but also the reasons for those responses.

Communication/Negotiation: Reading the textbook "Fierce Conversations" by Susan Scott profoundly affected my motivation to speak frankly and openly to others about longstanding issues. This has transpired most significantly in a work and community context with spectacular results I think mainly because of the improved trust and understanding that comes along with this approach which in turn leads to more satisfying negotiations. An additional benefit is that, because I now share my frustrations through conversations directly with the people that matter, I'm less likely to be anxious about unresolved issues and spend more time in a positive mindset.



Despite being logical and highly effective, having fierce conversations remains an approach that most people struggle to adopt.

Critical Thinking: The ARLP has challenged me to learn about and adopt good processes about decision making in every aspect of my life. This journey commenced abruptly in the Kimberley when it became all too apparent that when given a task to complete in a short period it is automatic to launch into completing the task without stopping first to gather the appropriate information and think about the best way to complete the task. This is complicated when the task is given to a group, especially one that is newly formed. Almost every day I draw on this experience to not only achieve tasks more efficiently and effectively but also more calmly and collectedly.



Among the most successful business ventures in Indonesia relied on strong co-operation among stakeholders – I continue to ponder the influence of religion and availability of technology on this approach.

Collaboration/Co-operation: Prior to starting the program, it was personally challenging for me to initiate opportunities to partner strategically with others – consequently my main tactic for impact was through leading by example. When we formed our groups in the Kimberley I expected that we would work together to achieve the best possible outcome – however, instinctively the group became competitive toward other groups which was a rude awakening. This was the first in a series of lessons throughout the program of the huge benefits that can be gained through co-operation and partnering with others, especially those with different skill sets, to achieve goals. Moreover, we learned that these goals don't necessarily need to be the same end point. As a result I now find myself thinking instinctively of how working with others can lead to better outcomes.

Leadership Contributions – now and in the future

After each session of ARLP I set myself goals to achieve before the subsequent session to encourage the translation of my learning into leadership in practice.

After the Kimberley session I initiated a long overdue crucial conversation with a work colleague during which we learned each other's perspectives on sources of frustration in our relationship. Since then I feel that we have been functioning at a much higher level and as a team with mutual trust and respect for our particular beliefs. More generally, I also feel as though I communicate more honestly with people rather than avoiding potentially confronting issues. This has been a much easier process with people at work and my broader community and into the future I hope to apply it more liberally also during interactions with close family and friends.

I have long held health and well-being as a top priority in my own life. The seminar on executive health during the program inspired me to impact others (beyond leading by example) by strategically exposing them to fun and digestible scientific information about this issue. I now lead a 10 minute health and well-being segment within the regular meetings at my workplace which are attended by all staff.

We were privileged at the Kimberley to glimpse Indigenous Australian culture and hear first-hand of the impact of European settlement on local Indigenous communities. Since returning I organised training at our workplace to broaden the knowledge and understanding of Indigenous issues and cultures using an ethics framework that reflects, acknowledges and respects Indigenous values. The parochial response by some staff to the training suggested that more could be done within our organisation to demonstrate the value of cultural diversity. Consequently, I took on the responsibility of developing an Indigenous Employment Strategy for CSIRO at our site which extends beyond recruiting and mentoring workplace ready staff to engaging and training less experienced trainees and cadets. In the future I hope to expand this initiative to include partnering with Indigenous communities to achieve mutually beneficial research objectives.



Rachel Tompkins recently graduated from a High School Based Traineeship with CSIRO through the Aboriginal Employment Strategy and is now undertaking an Indigenous cadetship with CSIRO.

The value of critical reflection is a theme that transcends the entire ARLP experience. During my personal presentation to the group, in addition to the challenges I see professionally for rural, remote and regional Australia, I drew on an exercise that involved contemplating the environment and events that shaped my values and beliefs, to share through my presentation who I am and why. The process included asking peers how they would describe me and what they see as my strengths and weaknesses as a leader. This process not only provided content for my own thoughts but in some cases also stimulated my peers to seek insights which in turn led to their own critical reflection.

A number of ARLP experiences reinforced to me the power of networking and partnering with others. For example, during a critical navigation exercise in the Kimberley, our group received training from an expert in our team who shadowed us during the real situation while we each took it in turn to practice our newly learned map-reading skills. Consequently, I have strategically engaged in fierce conversations with members of teams that I lead (at work and in the broader community) about the value of contributing ideas and resources for greater good beyond the level of individuals or even immediate teams. This in turn has sharpened my own resolve to practise the same approach.

At the RIRDC Rural Women's Award dinner in September my networking resulted in an opportunity to partner with Jane Milburn (who by coincidence is a graduate of ARLP from Course 16) to inspire upcycling of natural fibres including cotton, demonstrate slow fashion through refashion, and revive home-sewing as a life skill. I was invited to be on the council of minds for this endeavour (textilebeat.com/about/) and in particular, to explore ways to engage producers of cotton.



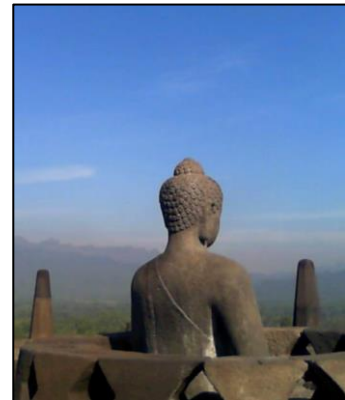
TextileBeat is a social enterprise inspiring a careful yet creative approach to the way we dress through slow fashion.

While I have always thought myself to have treated people from different cultures and religions equally, I realised that I have been missing opportunities to learn more about their different environments, experiences, values and beliefs as a way to not only better appreciate who they are but also to better understand who I am. To a lesser extent, this issue extends beyond culture and religion to, for example, different sectors of employment in rural, regional and remote Australia. To sum up, by interacting with the diverse group gathered in this course and through various seminars and experiential activities, I have realised there is something to learn from everyone if you take the time to seek it out.

What is the value of the ARLP in developing effective leaders for rural, regional and remote Australia?

The ARLP has been invaluable not only as an opportunity to trial different leadership styles and approaches in a safe environment but also as a conduit to information, experts, and experiences that would otherwise be difficult to acquire. Perhaps the greatest benefit of the 18 month program is forging strong and lasting relationships among a diverse group of leaders that are committed to advancing a more resilient rural regional and remote Australia.

It is not just an 18 month experiential leadership course – it's an extraordinary invitation to follow a lifelong path of learning and reflection not only to benefit oneself but for the greater good of communities at large. By engaging established leaders that are passionate about rural, remote and regional Australia, much of that good will be directed into those areas.



The ARLP is an extraordinary invitation to follow a lifelong path of learning and reflection.

Sharon Downes
25 September 2015

Australian Rural Leadership Program: Course 21 Final Report



Graduates of ARLP Course 21, 2015