

Riches through relationships.

I have been involved in some interesting projects over the last couple of months. My work has continued its international flavour which has been complemented by the new dimensions of working at industry level.

On the home front I continue to work closely with a number of significant teams – including those in our own businesses. I have especially enjoyed collaboration with other professionals involved in high performance coaching whose knowledge of the primary sector and involvement in elite sports has helped me and my clients gain quality insights to leading edge relationship management.

I have also had contact with Dairy Australia's "People in Dairying" program and am impressed by the comprehensive information and tools they are making available to Australian dairy operations. It's well worth visiting their website www.thepeopleindairy.org.au to find out more.

This combination has challenged some long held perspectives and beliefs and opened new opportunities to add value around staff management.

Perhaps the next frontier for many farming employers is to make more effective use of performance reviews to give and get feedback on performance and expectations.

I have long promoted this process to my clients. Until recently my approach has been to help them carry out appraisals a couple of times per year. We have used a relatively formal approach which has meant a good opportunity to "stop the clock" and review from everyone's point of view.

I now realise reviews can be even more effective when carried out on a more frequent and less formal basis. That's what we've learnt from the sports environment.

Successful teams seem to have a strong focus on regular review. The post-match evaluation of performance and restatement of expectations translates to a more natural and spontaneous style of self-management. Players see the review process as routine. Rather than feeling as if they are put under the spotlight, they see reviews as a chance to grow in their understanding of what constitutes a win for them and the team.

This only works if there is joint commitment to team goals. Underpinning these are the values of the team and the organisation they represent. These values are not just about the business owners. They encompass the whole team's vision so "win/win" becomes much more achievable.

We're working hard to better connect the vision of farm owners with the day to day focus of their staff. This has meant a new level of motivation and meaning for all involved. Rather than relying management through policies and protocols, these teams are developing self-governing, self-directing style that breaks down the barriers of uncertainty or incomplete information. It all translates to much more effective team dynamics.

This more transparent approach has also helped overcome another common frustration for many employers and supervisors - how to get participation from their team at staff meetings.

Many supervisors take a relatively superficial approach with meetings primarily focused on logistics and instructions. This "head talk" on its own is neither interesting nor that inspiring to the team. Meetings add greater value if the agenda is balanced by more "heart talk" to restate vision and values, deal with frustrations, celebrate satisfactions and explore new challenges.

Anyone struggling with their staff meetings would be well advised to reassess their meeting agenda and evaluate how much this reflects the team's values as opposed to simply delivering information as a management briefing.

Getting this right is the key to success with teams. I'm learning it's less about formality and more about simplicity and fun. Connecting the business plan to the hearts and minds of the team will contribute much more to the bottom line than concentrating solely on what is achieved by arms and legs!.

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