

## THE LONELINESS OF LEADERSHIP

As we move into a downward trend for farm returns, your effectiveness as a leader will dictate progress or plateau for your businesses. Being in the hot seat brings out the best in some and magnifies the limitations of others. Finances, weather, seasonal workloads and staff management can make life tough at the top. It can certainly be lonely so self-management and perspective are critical to success.

As a consultant I get a close up view of various styles. Some choose to make obvious all of the emotion and stress associated with leadership. They don't need to say how they're feeling – you pick up the vibes by their manner and tone. This “Misery Bags” style is self centred, destructive and a hand brake on the business and its people.

Contrast this with those who are proactive and positive. Faced with the same set of circumstances these leaders focus on their areas of control – the things they *can* change. They accept you can't change the weather but you can change your management. You can't change the milk price but you can cut your costs. You can't change people but you can challenge, empower or discipline them to get results that everyone can be proud of.

Perhaps the difference is acceptance of reality. I think it's well summed up in the first paragraph of Scott Peck's book “***The Road Less Travelled***” This very worthwhile read begins – “***Life is difficult!***”

There's no explanation, excuses or comment. It's as simple as that. Acknowledging that fact seems to make the rest more manageable. I believe that's what the positive have done and what the misery bags have yet to do. Thriving on rather than avoiding challenge is what results. So what can you do to thrive in leadership? There's a lot to work on but I suggest two key areas:

### ***Self-Management***

A basic challenge for all human beings is to accept that our response to difficulties dictates our success – it's all about how we choose to react. This contrasts with the mindset some operate with that seems to imply the world owes them a living. Harnessing opportunity this way is all about getting outside your comfort zone and dealing with issues and welcoming the challenge.

Our personality styles can make some tasks seem daunting. If you are a peacemaker then resolving conflict or disciplinary discussions with staff may seem too hard. If your action oriented your drive for autonomy will make doing your budgets something you'd rather avoid. Recognise the limitations of your personality and behaviour patterns and don't let them be a limiting factor!

This proactive style of leadership is all about putting your immediate needs on hold and modifying your behaviour to move a situation forward. It means encouraging others, expecting the unexpected and dealing with issues without destroying relationships.

Such a role is draining and demanding. If your day constantly involves this type of pressure you need to re-evaluate your role. Perhaps your plan (if there is one!) is unsound. Perhaps your skills or capital structure are not right. Perhaps it's time to get some help to improve the balance for the sake of your profits, health, relationships and sustainability.

Make sure you get the best support outside the business and doing your homework. Up to date information and communication with your professional team will be a key resource. This will ensure you are being realistic and using all available ideas. Keep the balance between work and play so life is enjoyable and in perspective.

### ***Communicating Confidence***

The second key ingredient is convincing others that your plan can work. This means rising above the self-doubt and negativity to encourage others through affirmation and enthusiasm.

This needs to go further than simply 'lip service'. It means more than just saying the right things. It must translate to doing the right things. Leaders who constantly talk as if they are on the verge of failure are like airline pilots announcing an anticipated crash. That's hardly a way to keep the passengers and crew focused. Sure you'll have concerns and doubts - but passing them on to your team in the hope that fear will bring better performance is a destructive strategy. It will only promote desertion.

The key is open and regular communication. There's no better technique than asking your staff for help and telling them what they can do to make a difference. Too often I find team leaders haven't asked their team for help and yet they still complain their people are not contributing.

I have the privilege of working for some dynamic leaders. Being in their company can be like touching the electric fence. There's a charge of energy and optimism from the time we meet. They live in no different world to you and me - the one thing they have mastered is their attitude, their response and therefore their leadership.

Without goals, vision and a supportive team the pressures on you can seem insurmountable. Understanding yourself and communicating confidence will mean as leader you can turn negative to positive, turn apprehension to profit.

***Kerry Ryan is a Registered Agribusiness Consultant, Speaker and Publisher. You can contact him at [www.kerryryan.co.nz](http://www.kerryryan.co.nz).***