

Your Attitude Determines Your Altitude

Farming in 2003 has no shortages of challenges. Droughts on both sides of the Tasman, conflict in the Middle East and disappointing dairy returns are but three of the drivers of what has the potential to be a severe outbreak of negativity. Some will fail to see these circumstances as opportunity in disguise. Smart operators will reduce the risk of negative attitudes by evaluating what they say, what they hear, read or watch on TV and who they mix with. They'll invest time and resources in keeping attitudes right as a key strategy for troubled times.

So what are the ingredients?

Positive or optimistic?

I've given up on positive thinking and replaced it with optimism. To me, positive thinking implies one should simply brush events off and look at the sunny side of life. That's fine in theory but not so easy when financial or family outcomes bite deep. Keeping your attitude right is not the same as putting your head in the sand.

An optimistic outlook takes effort but it's well worth striving for. Getting the right people around you, developing your leadership skills and keeping events you have no control over in perspective is an excellent mix for facing challenges. It means having the right professionals on board and having them analyse or evaluate your position objectively and honestly. It means keeping your staff and colleagues focused to help you overcome adversity. They need to believe you can get through tough times and they look to you as business owner and employer for confidence. That task alone will draw heavily on your emotional tanks and leadership skills. As the catalyst for optimism you'll need to have strategies that keep your batteries charged.

What we say or do

How you communicate with others – especially colleagues and staff - has a huge effect on the culture of your operation and the confidence that results. It's always fascinated me that when I ask someone how their day's going some reply "*not too bad*". This response gets me thinking they were expecting things to be worse. Some even seem surprised it's gone so well.

I've experimented with responses like "*I think today is going to be the best ever!*" or when asked how I am today responding, "*Any better and I'd be dangerous!!!*" Sure these are only words but the transformation that happens in the conversation afterwards is worth the effort. Try this with staff, supermarket check out operators and with fellow farmers and feel the atmosphere lift.

What we see or read

There is no shortage of misery on our TV screens and in our media. This ranges from international events to farming outlooks or how dairy processors are performing. So much of this is inaccurate or irrelevant yet we immerse ourselves – often at the most stressful times of day – in a dose of negativity by watching superficial news reports more akin to entertainment than information.

I returned from Australia in January impressed by farmers' positive attitudes to the drought. It amazed me that some media comment talked about the drought lasting 5 years. Where this came from I'll never know. I returned in February to find some parts coping with "the big wet". How quickly things can change!

Of more significance was a climatologist's presentation at a conference I addressed. He talked about a key cause of drought ("el nino") being dead and gone. This confirmed the value of being selective between sensationalism and science. Choose your news sources carefully and ration your intake. Accuracy is critical to your optimistic outlook.

Who to mix with

In the current environment some of my progressive clients often try to avoid contact with fellow farmers. The local stock sales or farmer cooperative meetings can be an exercise in talking the future down. Milk processors and marketers become a favourite target and the grapevine pumps away with all of the gossip about how much worse things are likely to get. My suggestion is to choose your company carefully so you can stay fresh and optimistic.

Take regular time off, maintain your physical fitness, make sure there's variety in life and simply count your blessings to deal with negativity. Don't let dinnertime become a directors meeting. Put a limit on how much business intrudes into family time. Get to work on your golf handicap, hobbies or other activities that deliver satisfaction while your business is on hold.

Most of all ensure one bad season does not lead to another. This season's decisions need to be bold enough to ensure negative affects are contained within this year and that the best flying start can be secured for the next. Get advice or form an optimists buzz group to get ideas. You'll be amazed what peer support can do.

If you keep your attitude right, you get your altitude right. Tough it out and be there when opportunities emerge as others decide they've had enough!! If nothing else its character building.