



Welcome to the April 2018 issue of my notes.

Approximate read time: 12 minutes

The show season has finished and we begin the countdown to conference in Wellington. I have continued travelling to shows, tried my hand at judging both horses and succulent beef under the careful supervision of experts. I have met some wonderful and inspiring people and experienced young people hopeful of the chance to be more actively involved in helping to create our future. During the break, and apart from District AGMS and Conference, I look forward to getting some much needed work done around home before the new season arrives.

Is the first idea the best idea?

There is a scientific reason why your first idea isn't usually your best one. Our brains are lazy. The first idea we have is usually the handiest rather than the best. To get your brain to your best idea, Neurologists will tell us, the key to innovation is to distrust the first answer and send it back. Once we have cleared our minds of the obvious, we must push our minds further to come up with new ideas. This is when creativity kicks in and powers our thinking.

There is always an opportunity hidden within a problem. And rather than being a problem solver we should look to become solution creators. The process of having original ideas that add value is individual and individuals in a group situation will only contribute in a positive, encouraging environment. If people are scared of being mocked then they are going to be reluctant to step forward with new ideas.

Ongoing criticism, cynicism, and negativity can single handedly bring down a group leaving a string of casualties along the way. Research indicates that people who do that probably don't know what a creative idea looks like.

Creative ideas are by definition novel and that can trigger feelings of uncertainty that make people uncomfortable. Uncertainty makes us less able to recognize creativity, perhaps when we need it most. People dismiss creative ideas in favour of ideas that are purely practical – tried and true.

By and large, we tend to be threatened by creativity, and are eager to shut it down.

This brought to mind the issues facing Thoroughbred breeding and racing in the 80's which had a terrible impact on the industry. At the time Sir Patrick Hogan took on a second term as President of the Thoroughbred Breeders Association to help steer through changes in the industry, which he considered were not only desirable, but vital for its long term health.

Whilst change started to take place he noted, "*...the critical voices remained a force to be reckoned with...there needed to be a greater degree of cooperation than had existed in the past, and less parochialism from racing clubs.*"

He urged those who were prepared to listen to bury their differences for the greater good. He said, "*One of the problems we will always have here in New Zealand is our very spread out population. However, the industry must cater for all those within it and encourage new participators.*"

Encouraging multiple perspectives, diverse viewpoints and out of the box thinking increases dramatically the chance of finding not just the best idea but the right idea.

Origins of the Districts

Faced with a serious loss of interest in the RAS in the early 30's the President, Mr L.R.C. MacFarlane of Canterbury, introduced a new constitution the terms of which was to work up local interest through 5 (now 6) district councils which would have the right of taking turns of having the Royal Show in their districts.

Executive / Districts Meeting

In February, the Executive met with representatives from the District Councils. Having at least two such meetings a year is something I introduced whilst I was the Vice – President.

It usually involves the Chair of the District Council. The respective Secretary/Managers, or at least one other member of the Council also attend and the aim is to make sure we are all well connected. Most importantly this year was the second stage of developing the RAS Strategy. In my last notes I wrote:

"The Executive will initiate the process by collecting together our various thinking towards such a plan. We will contribute 4 suggested key Strategic Goals which we will share with the Districts... We will ask the Districts to communicate with their members and come back with 4 organisational goals plus 2 District goals."

A copy of the work the Executive had done already was sent to the Districts Chair and Secretary/Manager. We got their initial impressions then worked through the same process for their ideas. A revised paper will be circulated to District Councils which they in turn will send on to their members in readiness for discussion at the next District meeting.

Strategic Plan

Districts are now be preparing for their AGMs. I will endeavour to travel to as many of the six as I can. This year I am particularly interested in hearing ideas for their strategic plan from our member owners.

In the past the Executive has had to pick up the responsibility for producing the strategic plan, however I have put a stop to that. Certainly, as mentioned above, the Executive has started the process by providing some initial thoughts and ideas, and seeking those of District Chairs.

The strategy of the organisation should be the plan of the organisation owners that describes how they all will create more value together than they would individually. The Executive, are elected by the owners to supervise the operation of the plan on their behalf.

That Strategy will provide the Executive with their mandate and road map for the immediate future of the organisation. Decisions and actions will be referenced against that Plan.

Looking for leads for inspiration

'The "roots" are our heritage, attitudes, vision and values. We need to help our people and the next generation of leaders to understand what they are part of. Then...we need to give them "wings" ...where they can be inspired to express themselves.'

That statement was in Motivation, a Journal by Ozone Coffee Roasters I was thumbing through at Le Café in Taihape over Christmas. The title had caught my attention and I began reading a piece entitled 'Why Be Big?' by David Hieatt. He is the co-founder of Huit Denim and Do Lectures, and wrote 'Do Purpose'. I asked the owner of the café where I could get a copy. Apparently Ozone give it free to those cafes that use their coffee. She was interested to know why I wanted it and when I told her, she gave it to me.

I couldn't resist doing more research on this guy and what he does. I signed up for the free newsletter and read one of his Blog posts, 'Why do ego-less teams win?'

'The rarest team to form is the selfless team. It is also the most potent. When a team comes together and makes the decision that all that matters is the central purpose – when every action, breath and thought goes into making that happen, and everyone is aligned – then that team can achieve the impossible.

It can beat the odds. It can punch above its weight because egos have had to leave the team for the team to be able to play at its absolute maximum.'

Organisation culture stems from the collective personality of the group.

David went on to reference the books 'Eleven Rings' and also 'Tribal Leadership'. I found my inquiring mind demanding I travel further into the internet to follow these learning leads.

But back to Why Be Big. It turns out that people remember not how big you are but what change you made.

NZ Rare Breeds Conservation Society

It would be a year ago since John Earney (President, Rare Breeds Society) and I chatted about how their Society could be more involved in the A&P movement. He was very enthusiastic and spread the message at their conference just before ours. During this season I have seen a display of some kind by members of the Society at just about every show I have attended. They always attract attention. I was fascinated by the 4 horned sheep on display at the Oxford Show. I would encourage shows to get in contact with their nearest branch and encourage them to display and inform at their show. <https://www.rarebreeds.co.nz/>

Mycoplasma Bovis

During the showing season, a number of shows made the decision not to include cattle sections to help reduce any risk of transmitting Mycoplasma Bovis. It was a big but courageous call well made.

The Government allocated \$34m and industry groups contributed \$11m to a response in the hope the disease could be eradicated – an expectation which may turn out to be a pipe dream given the disease exists just about everywhere else in the world.

In true tabloid fashion, media desperately try to make news out of anything that drives fear or greed, but mostly fear. This issue is a good example. Whilst it would have been great that we didn't have MB, maybe we should have been educating more on the lack of threat to humans.

In ensuring the future of shows I think we need to promote our network across the country as an excellent platform for agricultural education in the broadest sense of the words.

Are there animals other than horses at shows?

I will be encouraging a greater involvement of the United Breed Societies group in future guidance of the Showing Movement. On lookers at our meetings could be forgiven for thinking we are an equestrian sport group, when they attend meetings where discussion about that aspect of showing dominates the meetings with very little airtime available for the other aspects of agricultural showing.

Don't get me wrong – I am not suggesting equestrian is unimportant – after all that is how I became involved in A&Ps and goodness knows I spent much of my time in the past advocating to the Auckland Regional and our local Council on the diversity and significance of the broader equine industry.

Just as I set up the meetings between the RAS Executive & Districts, I will be advocating that at least once a year and outside of conference, the Executive and UBS meet to discuss the wider livestock involvement and promotion in showing.

Dairying

The Government will be releasing the terms of reference for the Review of the Dairy Industry Restructuring Act (2001), which regulates Fonterra's role. The review will be considering key issues facing the dairy industry, including environmental impact and land use for example.

Our Dairy group could be advising us on these matters and help pitch to Government and others how A&P Shows provide an excellent platform for awareness building, community engagement and education.

Whilst Fonterra have established their open day where up to 400 people may visit a dairy farm (great idea by the way), an A&P Show brings a much wider and diverse audience of thousands.

Dirty Dairying / Dirty Urban

Earlier this year there was an ironic turn of events in Auckland. The Dirty Dairying/Farming lobby up our way found that the waterways weren't being contaminated by farming, rather urban sewage. Many of the huge number of beaches in the greater Auckland area had health warning notices posted.

Of course the community will expect Councils to pay to sort that. What they do not realise is that farmers are the single biggest personal contributors to improving the environment.

NZ Farmers and growers are recognised as being world leaders in the management of their natural resources and the NZ Farm Environment Trust celebrates and promotes sustainable management practices.

The Trust facilitates the annual Ballance Farm Environment Awards to showcase the nation's environmentally responsible and profitable farmers.

Our shows could be great venues to show and tell these stories. Districts could connect with the Farm Environmental Trust and see how they could work together to promote the Awards and showcase the winners at the Show.

Why A&P Shows are increasingly important

Last year the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) commissioned a survey to gauge public support for agriculture. Respondents were categorised as either urban or rural. And whilst it appears the so called rural – urban divide isn't so great, we have to remember the significant majority of our population is urban, well over 80%.

So when the survey reports 50% of rural and 47% of urban respondents had a positive view of dairy farming, that means in people head count over 50% of the significant portion of the respondents did not have a positive view.

Agriculture has many great stories to tell. As I have said before, the A&P Shows provide an excellent platform from which the truth and value of agriculture should be available to the thousands who visit our shows.

The USP (Unique Selling Proposition)

One way we can get more support is to emphasise the value of our proposition.

- Just how many people go to A&P Shows throughout the country? Probably a huge audience far in excess of that attending any concert.
- How much do the shows generate in economic value to their community?
- How many trade sites do business there and or see the show as a great marketing opportunity to tell their story and promote their business?

To attract sponsors and trade exhibitors shows need a USP (Unique Selling Proposition) and also be able to evidence EVA (Economic Value Added). For example, Horse of the Year is now getting support of the local and district council. Why? Because the event is unique and adds value, approximately \$13m worth to the local economy in a week.

Congratulations to the Hawkes Bay A&P as they reach out, linking to other events. Recently they hosted the Hawkes Bay Primary Sector Awards at the showgrounds in Hastings. As part of those Awards, they presented the Lawson Robinson Hawkes Bay A&P Scholarship. Their alliance with the awards is a great example of a compatible strategic alliance.

Selfie Generation most likely to volunteer

Millenials and Gen Z were often perceived as "fickle or entitled", the reality may be quite different. According to new research in Australia they are the demographic most likely to volunteer.

The research, which surveyed more than 2,000 people, found the so called "selfie-generation" was among the most helpful and community minded in the country. They are well connected, open minded, and have the energy and optimism needed to make a difference.

Often what we call volunteering, people don't necessarily see as being a volunteer, they may consider themselves helping out or working on a project, they might not use the volunteer word. And it appears that is often the case with young people.

However the biggest barrier to helping others or volunteering were identified as working commitments, "busyness" and out of pocket expenses involved.

To take advantage of this insight, organisations in Australia are taking a different approach to volunteering, and not just sticking to the traditional models. They adopt a project based and skill based approach instead of just the long term traditional model.

What About our Young People?

Over the last few months I have been building a reference panel of young people who are very active in the A&P movement. There are 21 of them so far, ranging in age and from one end of the country to the other. They don't have meetings nor are they expected to contribute anything other than their opinion from time to time. No individual's opinion is reported. Answers to questions are aggregated and fed back to the Youth Council, the Executive and the District Chairs.

Recently I asked the Panel three questions. Why are you involved; What do we do that creates barriers to your involvement; and What would you change about the organisation? Here are some themes that emerged:

1. Why are you involved?

Family tradition; love of livestock; community involvement; love the sport; showing a passion; learn new skills.

2. What do we do that creates barriers to your involvement?

The whingeing; the negativity; ideas fall on deaf ears; ears and eyes are closed to suggestions and hints of change; very daunting trying to share ideas; not as open to change with the times and create a more popular and modern show; working full time; trying to get ahead with career; resources not available for young people competitions; no youth membership; limited events offered to the youth outside of competitions; struggle to find time; no clear sense of direction for youth.

3. What would you change about the organisation?

More young people; a "buddy system" of a youth member; embrace the agriculture breeds include life stylers; bring in new ideas as well as keeping up with heritage; Get more involved with other organisations; be seen as more relevant; revamp and modernise the way the Society is run; have a guide as to how to get or attract more young competitors to get involved earlier; better communication as to what the role and purpose of the RAS.

I have seen some great examples of encouraging youth and acknowledge Hawkes Bay for the large team of youngsters running the youth sections at the Royal; Oxford for their young lady Senior and Junior Vice Presidents, and to Manawatu for their youngest President in the movement.

What do you think of this?

I thought we could have an IDEAS workshop where Show Presidents and Secretaries present a brief case study on a problem they have dealt with successfully or a clever idea that has paid off, or some other positive / creative / challenging event.

I always thought creativity was about coming up with original ideas, but it turns out our creativity is really just about making new connections between existing ideas. This is pretty exciting because it makes creativity suddenly less scary: we can all connect things that already exist, right?

Connecting with other organisations

It was great to be invited to attend the Shearing Finals again this year. In the past, the RAS Gold Excellence Medals were presented with all the other prizes to the Open Shearing and the Wool Handler winners. This year, after they had received their various prizes I was invited up to individually present our medals. It was most gracious of the organising committee to provide that opportunity to focus attention on the relationship between our two organisations.

Thanks to Jackie Kelly, Chairperson of the Southern District for presenting our medals at the Ploughing Championships in the Deep South.

I have had the opportunity of a couple of conversations with the Chairman of the Golden Shears. The relationship between our organisations has waned a little, however I am working to rebuild that. And I will be meeting with the CEO of the National Feildays to continue a discussion we have begun.

In Closing

There is a lot to be thinking about and no shortage of direct clues and ideas on how to develop. The fundamental starting points are the members needing to consider their responsibilities as owners; encouraging youth involvement and opening up our minds to a more positive future.

Thanks to those who supported the raffle to help fund youth activities and thanks to the Southern District for the idea.

Hopefully those who suffered damage during various storms are making a good recovery.

I look forward to seeing you at the District AGMs.

Geoff Smith

President

Royal Agricultural Society NZ (RAS)

<http://www.ras.org.nz/>



RAS Mission Statement : "To promote, motivate and support all members by assisting them to achieve their aims and objectives."

Check out the RAS -Harcourts Referral - it means \$\$\$ for your Association –

www.ras.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/RAS-Harcourts-Referral.pdf