

Bridging the Gap Part 2 - Summary Report

Debert Hospitality Center – March 26 & 27, 2013

25 registrations (20 active participants)

Guest Speakers: Elaine Froese, Farm Family Coach
Cedric MacLeod, MacLeod Agronomics Ltd.



The 2013 workshop focused on planning for farm succession or as it was referred to at the workshop, business continuation; the softer approach to farm succession. Participants were encouraged to set the mindset to go to work ON your farm business rather than IN your business.

In the opening presentation, participants were asked to identify some core values. What drives you? What gets you out of bed in the morning? What is the farm's vision statement and mission statement?

Does your farm have a budget? According to a FCC survey, only 34% of Canadian farm businesses stick to a detailed budget and a mere 16% have a written business plan. One of the key messages was to make a plan, set a timeline and stick to the plan. The group was given the Dick Wittman Guidebook to Building Effective Farm Management Systems. It is a step by step guide to assist farm families with the process.

Some other steps to consider in Strategic Business Management are:

1. Estate Planning – complete wills and long term financial planning
2. Understand the owner/manager compensation package
3. Define common goals
4. Regular business meetings
5. On farm support to start and maintain momentum
6. Define roles according to skills set
7. Understand communication and personality styles
8. Developing leadership skills
9. Get the right people on the bus
10. Reward yourself

Whatever the plan, make it manageable; break it down into pieces and manageable steps. A key factor to farm transition, succession, continuation is the farm owner's commitment.

How ready are you? On a scale of 1-10... Do you have Clarity, Certainty and Commitment to Act?

The group was asked some tough questions over the course of the workshop:

What do you want?

- Completion
- Enjoyment
- Happy family
- Legacy

What debt can you sleep with at night?

Where are you going to live?

What scares you about this process?

What are you afraid of?

- In general terms – the biggest fear for males is failure and for females it is the fear of rejection.

Who answers to who? Who is responsible for what?

Want to die broke? Want to leave a legacy of money or legacy of relationships?

Demographics of the 20 participants – 40% of participants at Bridging the Gap 2 were in their 50's,

20's - 20%

30's – 10%

40's – 20%

50's – 40%

60's - 10%

Challenges and topics that surfaced from the group during discussion were strongly led by fear of failure and fulfillment of their roles

25% Finances

30% Fulfillment of roles

30% Fear of Failure

5% Fairness

15% Family fighting

5% Forgiveness and respect

Discussion continued on effective family meetings and the importance of having them, followed by sample agendas and meeting formats.

- Attack the issue not the person
- Use of a talking stick
- Create a parking lot for questions and areas of concern not on the agenda – deal with them later, don't change the agenda
- Have guidelines for respect

Guest speakers highlighted Anger as a secondary emotion of

- Fear – not knowing how to cope with change
- Frustration – people who do not perform as the same level
- Hurt – how was the previous generation treated when they took over the farm? Do you know the history of your farm
- Exhaustion – depression / burnout

How are you building trust and confidence on your farm? Have you set boundaries? Do you treat each other as business partners or as family? Role confusion was addresses - Boss or Father?

Will decisions of today matter in 10 years?

- 80% of farmer's decision is emotional.

As the session neared the end, participants were ask to rate their Readiness to Act. 88% of participants answered 8+ on a scale from 1 -10.

In wrap up discussion, participants provided their greatest learning

Biggest Take Home Message (as recorded from participants)

- Got to talk, talk, go away, come back and talk, talk some more. Do it until it's sorted
- Need to hire an advisor for succession to plan for future of the farm
- Action begets Action – Balance – thankful for the history of the farm – having the focus of moving forward
- Communication, having board meetings and get an up to date will
- Need to develop a mission statement, vision and core values
- Other people have concerns too on the farm
- The Predictable Cycle of Renewal
- Communication tools - How to be curious and ask questions to get results
- To ask founder what scares them about the process
- The importance of action once a plan is in place
- Need to write things down as a way to start action on what we want to accomplish
- Continue with efforts to build a team
- Best money you'll ever spend is for a facilitator to help you through the tough questions.

Focus for the Future (as recorded at the workshop – input from participants)

- Bring back Elaine – excellent speaker
- Next session it would be great for 1 on 1 information
- To build on process – practical examples as some like Elaine shared

- SOP
- If this workshop is put on again, additional resources, summary of books/authors
- Bridging Gap resource website should be available
- Financial Planning and dealing with tax implications of transfer: What is out there? What should we be aware of?
- Plan Bridging the Gap 3 for next year
- Off farm investments and income streams
- Repeat much of what has been said – I hope to bring more family members next year
- How can we pair up farmer want-a-bee to mentor farmers?

In an evaluation wrap up – 64% rated the workshop as Excellent and 36% said it was Good. The speakers received good ratings and facility, venue and food services was rated a little lower. Participants felt there was good value for the registration fee, but suggested a different rate for not needing accommodations.

Moving forward, the Industry will continue to look at ways to further educate and inform the farm community of steps to farm continuation. We will look at the suggested focus for the future from the participants as well as gather guidance from our Council of Leaders for future direction.

Suggested Reading

- Good To Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don't by Jim Collins
- Instant Influence: How to Get Anyone to Do Anything--Fast by Michael Pantalon
- Now, Discover Your Strengths: How to Build Your Strengths and the Strengths of Every Person in Your Organization... by Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton
- Moolala: Why Smart People Do Dumb Things with Their Money - and What You Can Do About It by Bruce Sellery
- Why Don't You Want What I Want?: How to Win Support for Your Ideas without Hard Sell, Manipulation, or Power Plays by Rick Maurer

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