

SEGRA CONFERENCE BATHURST

SPOTLIGHT SESSION No 2 Presenter Cr Joan White

RISE UP LEADERS AND GET THINGS DONE

HOW CAN WE CHANGE THINGS?

Thank you for your introduction.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land past and present of the land.

I would also like to clarify that I am a councillor of the Goondiwindi Regional Council but I am speaking today as an individual and this does not reflect council's views.

MY STORY IS ABOUT, WHAT HAPPENED IN MY LIFE AND STIMULATED A VERY DIFFERENT JOURNEY FOR ME.

Recognising your strengths is great but until you can recognise your weaknesses your ability to work with in a network or team are very limited. Leadership is found in many forms, a leader is only as good as the network of people working with them. The person who is up front, being seen to be in the role of a leader brings their own style and provides the platform to bring people on board to form a powerful team.

As a wife and mother and in partnership with my husband in a small farming enterprise like many of you do ,the normal committee participation with school, sports and 100 other things involved in raising a family. Also working beside my husband in the paddock, in the piggery and the diversification of including Deer Farming, this is another story in itself.

In the early 90's we had been through a very persistent drought and we had taken all our cattle and put them in the LONG Paddock. This enabled us to purchase feed to keep our piggery going (normally we grew 2/3's of our own grain) and survival rations for the deer and sheep. Fodder was an exorbitant price which was stretching our financial position further than a piece of elastic can stretch. We had the bank threatening to foreclose on us as the mortgage was getting greater. Still trying to manage this, the words of wisdom from our accountant was "Alan give the boxing gloves to Joan", we survived that round.

This really changed my life

In 1994 my first grandson was born. Mitchell was a healthy, vibrant and naturally the apple of the whole family's eye. He became very ill at the age of 2 starting with a temperature and was air lifted from Texas hospital after it took the retrieval team 1 ½ hrs to stabilise him. There was no room for his mum Di to accompany him as it would not have left enough room for the medical team to work on him during the flight. Normally the choppers were not permitted fly over Cunningham's Gap but as time was of the essence the team made the decision to take the shorter route. Tim , Di, Alan and myself followed by car which placed us

several hours behind. After a very stressful, 5 hr journey with everyone deep in our own thoughts of fear of the unknown, I will never forget my husband's comments as we arrived at the Mater Hospital, as it was dark by this time, when he looked up, it appeared like a mountain of light to circumnavigate said, "OH MY GOD MUM WHERE ARE WE GOING TO FIND OUR BOY". After 18 months of intensive treatment for Leukaemia, consisting of many , highs and lows followed by hope then despair. The family shared their support and made sure that two members stayed at the hospital with him at all times. Supporting Tim and Di with constant vigilance, would have been impossible without the support from the Mater Children's Hospital and the Leukaemia Foundation. I felt as a mother, my duty was to get us all through this without us all falling in a heap.

One cold and miserable day I sat on my lounge room floor thinking about how my family was falling to pieces around me. I had stretched myself into so many directions and roles, providing support and hope to everyone around me. The feeling of despair! How can I keep my husband going as he was so distraught, and also be able to provide Tim and Di with some strength so they could stay focused, as well as the remaining members of the family.

Mitchell's medical progress and our own financial struggle to stay on the land and dealing with bank managers and accountants by phone, became a heavier load on my shoulders as time went on.

As I flicked through the Country Life in my state of tears and not being able to see properly but on automatic an advertisement jumped from the page.

RURAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING TO BE HELD IN CHARLEVILLE IN 10 DAYS TIME.

Sniffing, wiping my eyes I read on. It was a program developed by the Department of Primary Industries. I rang the number provided and told them that I wished to do this course. I was asked where I was from and I told them Texas in Queensland. I was told they were looking at holding this same course in Stanthorpe later in the year but most probably the following year. My reaction was spontaneous, "NO I CAN NOT WAIT THAT LONG I NEED TO DO THIS NOW, I CAN'T WAIT". This poor girl Tracey Cooper, tried desperately to explain to me that the course was over 9 months and included 4 days accommodation every 6 weeks, plus the cost of the course which was not quite \$500 per unit, plus travel expenses to Charleville

We had no money but I continued to persist as I didn't have to pay until the end of each unit. Then it was how do I get to Charleville. NO IDEA! Tracy told me they were all booked out but she thought an exception could be made in my case.

I explained my situation and asked for and was granted the use of a car from Inglewood Shire Council to attend the first unit(at this stage I was not involved with council at all), I headed for Charleville. The first unit was confronting, challenging, exciting but mostly changed my thinking planting seeds of optimism. That first unit finished at 2,30pm on the

fourth day, I headed for home. On the 9 hr trip home I was debriefing all the way. I cried for Mitchell but mostly for myself. If I could just let go and think about ME, and where should I go from here. I became excited at the prospects this offered, business principles, leadership, media training but best of all about ME and personal development. My intention was to drive as far as I safely could, stay the night and travel home next morning. Before I knew it I was in Goondiwindi 1 ½ Hrs from home. Reality hit me not far from home now – stop get something to eat and make it home tonight.

I cannot believe the changes that took place as I continued with so much enthusiasm to complete this challenge. At the time I was the president of the Deer Breeders Assn and a Director on the board of AgForce (the united farming organisation in Qld). It never ceased to amaze me the amount of people who would comment; “Wow, what has happened to you”. Smiling quietly to myself, I acknowledged that YES I had changed. So many people commented that I was different somehow but they could not put their finger on it. WHAT WAS IT- MY MINDSET. I continued to graduate from the Advanced Leadership program.

Texas community mourned the loss of Mitchell as greatly as our family when he left us at 6 weeks before turning 4 years old. Following this family tragedy \$30k was raised for the leukaemia Foundation. The driving force behind this was my children and Mitchell's 2 yr old brother Daniel who was a junior ambassador for the Leukaemia Foundation. Mitchell left a massive legacy as during his treatment he was the first person in the world to survive a white blood cell transplant. New drugs were implemented to take him into remission but unfortunately they could not find a matching bone marrow donor that would have been compatible enough.

Many of the Texas community travelled by a chartered bus and private cars to make themselves available as possible donors but to no avail. This wonderful community needs thanks in a greater way than words can express. These circumstances are what drove me to continue to do what I have to repay this community. Our little boy had not only touched so many lives he contributed to a medical breakthrough and now many leukaemia patients can be treated successfully. His vibrancy, sparkle in his eyes and his ability to draw people to him remained to the bitter end, I vowed to not let him die in vain but it was my responsibility to take this positivity and make it work for everyone. Turning the negative into the powers and actions of positive thinking.

I was passionate about the rural demise and stood twice as a candidate in the Southern Downs electorate for the QLD State Parliament. I had travelled from one end of Qld to the other, talking with people from all walks of life. Listening and taking notes. It was soon evident that country communities have many skills and excellent knowledge, producing the world's best quality food and producers accepting prices offered so they are able to meet their financial commitment and be able to survive.

Four years later in 1996 after becoming a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, I stood for local Government and was successfully elected as Mayor of the Inglewood Shire which was pre Queensland's shire amalgamations. My desire was to make a difference and succeed. I needed to be THE BIRDIE IN THE BISCUIT TIN NOT ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN. I am a current councillor of Goondiwindi Regional Council.

My family after much deliberation in 1990's diversified and included Deer to our mixed farming enterprise. After receiving a Certificate in Marketing and Economic Development from Southern Cross University with the goal in mind to grow and market our own Wilga Vale Venison

Resulting from this I was named runner up to the Queensland Rural Woma of the year award. In 2004 I was granted a scholarship for my contribution to Rural and Remote Communities which assisted me financially when I was chosen as a Queensland delegate to attend the World Congress for Rural Women held in Madrid and followed by a study tour of Spain and France.

The Federal Government as part of an export market strategy hosted the Chefs from Dubai Program and the reciprocal return promotion sent 6 chefs from Australia to 6 different restaurants in Dubai serving nothing but Australian produce. It was a privilege to be selected as one of the 6 Australian producers to accompany and support these chefs and our Australian product. The biggest thrill on my return was being chosen to do a ministerial presentation. Look out here I come and this gave me the platform to push Regionally Branding and identifying our quality niche products in a global market.

My challenge for today is my appointment to the interim board of UN-RCE-MD and my role is to ensure the science and academics is translated into simple context to engage communities and people from all walks of life to understand and feel comfortable in making a contribution for the sustainability and economic development of their region into a long and prosperous future.

There is a network of people who are working to implementing change in a very different society with new and exciting concepts for the future

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE AND WHERE DO WE FIND THEM. DO NOT LET US RULE OUT THE COUNTRIES THAT ARE WATCHING AND CONSULTING WITH US. THERE IS GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE BUT ALSO A WORLD WIDE HUNGER FOR IDEAS THAT CAN BE GENERATED FROM RURAL COMMUNITIES IN OUR MURRAY DARLING BASIN. SHARING ACROSS A BROAD SPECTRUM IN COMMUNICATION AND TRUST IS LAYING THE STRONG FOUNDATIONS FOR OWNERSHIP TO COMMUNITTEES. THE CONTRIBUTION OF INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCE, SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE AND ENCOURAGING THE POWER TO LISTEN AND TO HEAR ARE THE INITIAL STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN TO IMPLEMENT OUR/YOUR GROWTH AND PROSPERITY.

My story is not about financial gains but about the contributions and learning's of my experiences. My personal gratification is having satisfactorily contributed to networking and contributing to challenges amongst rural and remote communities to unchosen change. My strength is in mentoring and communication enabling me to keep driving for the communities' voice to be heard and contribute towards planting a seed to stimulate positive changes that will be the foundation for a long sustainable future.

In closing I do not regard myself as a leader. I enjoy the challenge a bit like the dog that chases cars, once he has caught it he does not know what to do with it. Mitchell was a leader who endured experimental treatment in a cure for leukaemia which made medical history that benefited world medicine.

Cr Joan White

Goondiwindi Regional Council

Qld