

[ASK] #4 - Always Seeking Knowledge - About Change and Direction

Welcome to [ASK] - Always Seeking Knowledge!

#4 - Sunday, April 21, 2002

Written and Published by Bruce Ward, Holistic Results Pty. Limited

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1. Quick [ASK]

Monitor and monitor for the things that matter - in the plane it might be an engine running hot. For you it might be a market changing in accordance with an expected cycle. Get to know more and more about your industry and its cycles. Every industry has one and they are critical to your success.

2. Welcome

Autumn is upon us! In the Mediterranean regions of Australia the big event is always the 'Autumn break'. It has just occurred for many people in Western Australia - on April 16. And it occurred with a roar. In Perth the rainfall recorded was the highest one day fall in April, in 124 years. Falls inland seemed to range from 20 to 100mm, but at poor old Lake Grace the season starts again in deficit, with only 0.2mm received, I am told.

For grazing types it is now time to consider new grazing plans. For some these will be closed plans, and for others it is the wonderful exhilaration of a new growing season - and a new open plan. In either case it is your time to be creative. If you are coming into an open plan, do not forget to complete Column 8 of your closed plan, modifying it as necessary to reflect actual paddock performance. This is the step when you refine your ratings, and the figures in Column 8 become the new figures you will use in Column 1 of your new open plan.

Don't do what you did last year - you risk developing (or are already in) a rotation - with all of the fatal consequences they bring. You know the story!

During the week I read a passage in a book. It reminded me that your grazing plan (and all your other plans as well) must incorporate massive amounts of 'Human Creativity'. The passage asked why no two snowflakes are identical (NB: for 'snowflakes' read farms, families and businesses). The answer was written thus: *nature creates, nature does not duplicate*. Have fun creating a grazing plan this season. It is your life that you are creating.

And on another subject, Trevor Bunce told me before it rained that it would rain. How did he know? He had used the Richardson Rainfall Analysis process (if you do not know what that is, check the Attachments in your manual - you have it and should be using it). Using his own parameters, it revealed that if it did not rain he would be in record dry territory, based on 44 years of data. A simple technique that takes little time and can be of incalculable value to you.

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3. Around the Traps

WA

For many people the break has come just right. There will be a huge canola planting in the ground very soon. Unfortunately a lot of soil has moved, and it was galling to hear the ABC radio reports complaining that "the rain had been too heavy and had caused widespread erosion!!" Clearly it is nothing to do with the decisions humans make! One day the paradigms will shift and people will see the true situation.

A sad/happy note in the West as well. Many people have either met, spoken to or heard of *Pam McGregor* who farms at Kojonup with her husband, Jim. Pam is one of the pluckiest people I have ever met. In 1973 Pam became an 'incomplete quadraplegic'. On the day before Easter Pam was involved in a car accident, and was flown to Perth by RFDS in a critical condition. Since then she has undergone serious surgery, can now wriggle her toes, and when I saw her a couple of days ago she told me she plans to walk out of Royal Perth Hospital again, very soon! She will, you can bet your walking boots on it. A brave woman.

The Katanning group is coming to a close this week. It has been a wonderful group, comprising quite a few cropping people, such as *Kevin Cole* from Bruce Rock, *Ben and Tracey Lamont* from Tambellup, and *Eric Crossley* from Woodanilling. From Mt. Barker we have shared laughs with *John and Sheryn Howard*. *Johno Cook* from Dandaragan has been a big participant as has Boer Goat breeder *Isobel MacPhail*, from Mumbellup. In addition the group has been supported by a range of revision attendees.

Vic

Talking to *Sue Jaques* I hear that the season is starting to break around Yarrowonga as well. Good rain around Easter got them off to a better start than experienced for some years.

The Yarrowonga group continue to be strong and united in supporting each other as they practice new skills. They have decided to undertake a revision program, this time with another Educator, a move I applaud as it will bring them added diversity and benefit all around.

NSW

When I wrote last I was talking about 'dry'. There has since been good rain in many places. The mid north coast is in good shape now. The Gloucester group is complete, and a fully subscribed Wingham group will be up and running in May.

The impressive thing about the coastal groups is the 'freshness' of the people in them. Many of the people attending are city refugees who have elected to become farmers and experience a new life style. They come without all the conventional paradigms - and I believe they are making a big impact within their districts. For instance, I stayed a night with *Lorna and Garth Tomkinson* who are raising Wagyu cattle. Two years ago she owned a graphic design business, and Garth worked as a PR expert. I think they may be on a winner. They are getting great support from neighbours such as *Newman and Shirley Patmore*.

The Gloucester group, like me, were really impressed the other day when we visited *Bill and Rob Archinal's* property on a field trip. The Archinal work is an inspiration. They really have thrown the old habits away. The property is clearly improving, the cattle look wonderful and the smiles on Rob and Bill's faces cannot be described in words.

Qld

No news in Queensland. Are you still up there? Can someone tell me how you are going?

NZ

I sense that things are 'happening' in NZ. Prices for commodities remain high and land prices are still climbing fast. This year's NZ group completed their program a couple of weeks ago, spending part of the last day on Obelisk Station, Alexandra, the home of *Nicky Mead and Bert Elstob*, doing feed assessment exercises. *Neville and Margaret Bryant*, along with son *Craig* had some fun stories.

Tourism is big business in NZ. One day recently Neville was moving 6,500 crossbred ewes along a narrow road beside his property, when a lady from New York City came driving around the corner from the opposite direction. Confronted by the sheep, she froze. Then unfreezing, and desperately concerned for her insurance payout on the hire car should this wild flock attack and damage the vehicle, she began to reverse away from the ever approaching mob.

At first this was easy, but imagine the terrible state she was in by the time she had reversed 2.5 kms down this narrow lane, with a precipitous 100 metre drop on one side. To her, negotiating peak hour Apple City traffic was much easier than confronting vicious, oversized New Zealand sheep!!

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4. About Change and Direction

I was sitting in a Qantas Boeing 767 the other day with time to spend, contemplating and a bit confused. The layout in that aircraft was totally different to any other Qantas 767 I had ever flown in. The signs were in both Dutch and English. The aisles and the galley were different. So I started asking questions. The particular aircraft originally did service between Nairobi and Amsterdam, and had been snaffled by Qantas to meet the huge increase in demand for seats between Sydney and Perth, following the Ansett demise.

I began to realise I had fallen into a 'Qantas comfort zone'. After so many years the same I expected things to be the way they always had been. In fact, I think I had been conditioned by Qantas that this predictability was my 'right'. After all, this is the company who has never written off an aircraft, the one who gets you there safely, the one who has highly trained staff and modern equipment, and is profitable to boot. And now my comfort was challenged. It felt different. It is a silly little thing to even notice, but having just read *Who Moved My Cheese* (reviewed below) it struck me that I was experiencing a change, and the issue was not the change, but my response to it. And this is the issue of life. It is not the end - but the journey - that is important, some people say.

And that got me thinking even more. I was looking out the window studying the rhythmic roll these jets make as they hurtle through the stratosphere. The wings are never level, the plane is always minutely rolling from side to side, whether the signs inside are in Dutch or English. Then I realised that the plane was not only different, but lost as well!

Let me explain. Before take-off the pilots had used brilliant software in a smart computer to plan the course from Sydney to Perth. Furthermore, if trouble developed at any point on the trip, and the plan might need changing, they also knew which alternative airport made most sense at the time of any change. So confident in their plan were these pilots they weren't even flying the thing. They were monitoring it to be sure, but hands on flying. No! They relied on a thing called a 3 axis auto-pilot to fly the thing. And it was

lost. Temporarily.

An auto pilot responds to parameters such as course and altitude, which are set by the pilot. It keeps the aircraft on the track it is given. But in order to know it is on track it has to get slightly off track, so that its monitoring mechanisms can sense the 'off-track' reality, and make a correction. The wings ever so slightly roll to make the correction, and an inevitable over correction occurs. The plane is now off course to the opposite side. Sensing this over correction another correction, back the other way, occurs. And so the plane simultaneously hurtles forward and from side to side. In order to stay on track it must be off track to know where it is!! What a conundrum.

I suggest that you should take the same view about your planning procedures. Have the plan in place but expect that you will be minutely off plan much of the time. However, so long as you are moving in the right direction you will get there. Don't panic about deviations that are simply corrections. Keep on simultaneously rolling sideways and hurtling forward. Monitor and monitor for the things that matter - in the plane it might be an engine running hot. For you it might be a market changing in accordance with an expected cycle. Get to know more and more about your industry and its cycles. Every industry has one and they are critical to your success.

For pilots it is okay for their plane to be minutely off course most of the time. It would not be okay if they missed a turning point and kept flying on in the wrong direction when the conditions around them had changed. Same for you. Make sure you are not caught heading in the wrong direction when someone next 'moves your cheese'.

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6. Books and Materials you can use

"Who Moved My Cheese?"

Dr. Spencer Johnson's excellent book is, he says, a parable about modern life. Like most of the books I recommend, it is small, easily read and full of meaning. *Who Moved My Cheese* is about how we react when somebody changes the rules on us. In this case the mice suddenly had their cheese removed. How did they react? It is an intriguing story. Should they move on and find new cheese? Should they hang around expecting the cheese would return again? How would their various temperaments respond - would some be resigned to the new conditions, would some become angry, or would they be challenged to find 'new cheese'?

What is your 'cheese'? Is it the market - or market prices for your product? Are you stuck in the enterprises and activities you are in now, even when they are no longer working as well as they once did? Is it relationships that are changing around you? You can be sure that people are always moving our cheese. It is our response that matters, not the fact that the cheese has moved.

A must read for everyone, at around \$A17.95

By the way:

You can get this book from The Book Connection in Dubbo, NSW

Ph: 02 6882 3311 Fax: 02 6882 3311 or email orders@bookconnection.com.au

(Also ask them about their Mail Order Catalogue - it is terrific)

or

Scorpio Books in Christchurch, NZ

Ph: 03 379 2882 Fax: 03 379 2886 or email scorpbk@ihug.co.nz

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7. Joke.

This one is true, I am assured. It involves a Sydney couple looking to buy a property in the hills of northern NSW. They were delighted to hear whilst inspecting one property that the vendors had been keeping rainfall records for 120 years. "Can we see the records, please?", they expectantly asked.

"Oh, no", said the vendors, "we tear them up at the end of each year".

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8. Quotes that mean something

"An optimist sees an opportunity in every calamity; A pessimist sees a calamity in every opportunity."

--Winston Churchill

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

-- Margaret Mead"

"In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing. The worst thing you can do is nothing."

-- Theodore Roosevelt

"Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself."

-- Unknown

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Bruce Ward