

# ANSWERING THE WHY FOR YOUR BUSINESS – THE KEY TO SUSTAINING TEAM ENGAGEMENT AND CULTURE

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## Introduction

Dairy farming, like most other businesses, is changing significantly as the environment in which we operate changes. As the size and scale of dairy farming has grown over the years, so has its complexity. Being successful in farming today, while still hugely based on efficiently converting grass to milk, involves so many more skills such as financial planning, environmental knowledge, human resources, animal science, marketing and many more. Faced with the same challenges, each of us respond differently and while we observe physical or tangible events, most of our responses are intangible and based on our ideal future and what we value. If the criteria that we use to make decisions remain unclear or hidden from view, we make it difficult for the stakeholders in our businesses to understand what we are doing or where we are going (potentially causing confusion), and missing the huge potential that can be realised by enabling them to “think with us”. While knowing **what** you want to achieve in business is very important, it is **why** you want to achieve it that provides the motivation and meaning to all that you do. Few people take the time to understand this for themselves, let alone communicate it to others and business performance is compromised as a result.

The reality is that business today is more about empowering people than it is about managing assets. While this can be a difficult reality to accept, ignoring the change effectively places a ceiling on your business performance. In this regard, there are several key requirements that you as a leader in your business are responsible for.

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## **Establish a common purpose**

Most businesses know what they do and how they do it, but very few businesses know why they do what they do. Simon Sinek argues that people support organisations, not because of what they do or how they do it but why they do it. This is a difficult question for many to answer and involves the business leaders looking beyond the surface of the business and themselves to discover what it is that really motivates them to do their best work every day. As leaders in our businesses, we have a responsibility to create the culture for our team. Engagement comes not only when we capture people's hands and head, but when their heart is in it also. Creating a platform of common understandings creates a synergy that is very difficult to be achieved in any other way.

In our experience, enduring fulfilment and happiness does not come from possessions or achievements. Enduring fulfilment comes from a lot of self-reflection and understanding at a personal level who you are and what sustains you. Many seek fulfilment from the attainment of goals they have set for themselves or the business. While this may feel good, it isn't satisfying or sustaining. Your purpose should be something you are willing to strive for even when it costs you. This is a process of discovery, not of creation – it will be there; it is just taking the time to name it and make it clear so that those working with you understand and buy in to the journey.

As a leader in your business, adherence to a common purpose is the key foundation on which your business should be built. This should be supported by core values which provide the boundaries for how this purpose is to be achieved. Without this clarity, there is no "call to unity". This results in decisions being made based on the opinion of the person with the most influence, rather than being assessed by the degree to which they reflect the organisation's purpose and values.

## **Provide a structure that supports/enables the purpose**

The structure you put in place in your business is the framework that holds it together. The structure should not be put in place before your purpose is understood, otherwise it can be restrictive. Likewise, trying to make decisions in the absence of a clearly defined structure means that they can be difficult to implement. To use a building analogy, the purpose of your business is the foundation on which the framework sits. The framework is equivalent to the structure in your business. Once the framework is in place you can then begin making decisions etc. with confidence knowing that your business is strong enough to carry them out. Cutting corners on the framework/structure results in a leaky homes scenario whereby the outcomes you are trying to achieve in your business can't be sustained.

Many people relate business structure to ownership structure. Separate from how it is owned, a business needs a structure to support, and maximise value from relationships. Clearly defined meeting rhythms ensure communication flows appropriately through your business and that messages not only flow from governance through to operations but also from operations to governance. This means regular and structured meetings with a clear purpose – not meeting for the sake of meeting but to support the business in achieving its objectives.

## **Clearly define roles**

In our experience, people have an in-built desire to want to help. Those of you with children may have experienced this in your garden - many parents have seen their children pulling out their prized plants because they saw you pulling out weeds and thought they would help! In the absence of clear job descriptions, people will resort to their own understanding of what is helpful, and this is not always the best for the organisation. People need to know the one most important thing they can do to help propel the business towards its purpose.

Having clearly defined the role for each person in your organisation, in our view it is important to enable each person to contribute in their area of strength to the business, over and above their role. For example, you may have an assistant herd manager who has a particular interest in animal health. Let them be the liaison with your vet. This increases their level of engagement, releases you from a job that is not essential that you do, and enhances the culture of the business. It is highly likely that each person in your team will be better at something than you are – look for this in your team members and release them into it.

## **Provide feedback**

It is often said that “people respect what you inspect”. Put in other words, the performance you reward is the performance you incentivise. There is no point in describing one of your core values as team work if all you talk about is financial performance. The systems and processes in your business should reflect your core values, and your people should be evaluated against them.

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In his book, *Winning*, Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric states “No vision is worth the paper it is printed on unless it is communicated constantly and reinforced with rewards”. Talking about your purpose and reinforcing it regularly is critical to creating the performance culture you desire within your business. You may feel like you are overdoing it however it won’t feel like this to your team.

## **Conclusion**

Being a dairy farmer no longer means managing physical assets only. It requires an increasingly wider range of skills and it is impossible for one person to possess all of these skills. Running a successful business today requires collaboration to a greater extent than it has before, and as leaders in our businesses, it is our job to create the environment where everyone is motivated to contribute their very best effort each day. For this to occur, we need to clearly articulate to our team why our business exists, and outline clearly how we expect them to contribute towards that purpose. When this is understood, you create an exciting environment to which people are pleased to belong, and give their best effort for. This is a truly rewarding business.