



Farmer's Daughter

Leadership lessons from the barnyard to the boardroom

Growing up on a farm north of Toronto, I learned many skills that were transferable to my senior leadership career.

Be decisive. The road I lived on was covered with indecisive wildlife. This taught me that once you've decided to implement a strategy following a thoroughly thought-out plan, including input from key stakeholders, don't procrastinate. GO! People want to follow a leader who isn't afraid to make bold, educated decisions and accepts the outcome. Below is a model I follow to help me make decisions.

- Who will benefit, and who have I heard from?
- What is another perspective, and what is the best/worst case scenario?
- Where would we see this in the real world, and where do we go for help?
- When is the best time to take action, and when will we know we've succeeded?
- Why is it relevant to me and others, and why has it been this way for so long?
- How does this disrupt things, and how does this benefit us and others?

Work ethic counts. On my family farm, the pitch fork, hay bales, and livestock didn't differentiate between genders. Whether it was stacking hay, mucking out stalls, or feeding the animals, my two older brothers and I were expected to do our job. Our parents showed us what to do and supervised us until we demonstrated we knew what and how to do it properly. We were given clear expectations, we were held accountable, and we understood the consequences of not completing the job. When I took the agency management training course from LIMRA in the 1990s, we followed a similar model: prepare, explain, show, observe, and support the person so they can accomplish the job.

Bad things happen, get over it, and move on. I always remember a quote from my neighbours after their barn burned to the ground: "It is OK to rent a place in Pityville, just don't live there for too long." Their deter-



mination to rebuild and plan so their farm would survive them was inspiring. Time and again, through challenges I chose to rebuild my career with great organizations that have provided me with opportunities that have allowed me to attain levels I didn't realize I could. My mom always says, "What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger."

Be a thoroughbred in a pasture of ponies. Attracting and developing talent requires you to be unique and strong. When you are given a new portfolio, you need to quickly engage the team you've been asked to lead in order to identify their strengths and development needs. As the leader, you set the pace and the pace sets the standard. Make sure you're setting a high standard for those who have chosen to be on your team. Leadership is about recognizing high potential talent and developing that talent to become the next leader(s).

Grab a seat at the table. After the chores were done and it was time for a meal, I grabbed a seat at the dining room table. I spoke up with relevant and intelligent contributions to the family conversation. No different today, I take my seat at the board-

room table, prepared and ready to contribute to the discussions that will help our leadership team make the decisions we need to make in order to grow our business.

Don't go out in your dirty boots and messy coveralls. When we went out for groceries, to visit friends and family, or to school, our parents expected us to dress presentably. It's important to remember "dressing for the day you're having" may be different than the day your colleagues are having. As my dear mentor and friend Arlene M, has often said, "Your day may not be the day I'm having, and I'm having my top client into the office today."

Regardless of where or how you grew up, there are lessons you've learned that have been impactful on your career. You may not have recognized them yet, but this is a great time of year to reflect and move forward. **■**

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