



# 30 TIPS FOR BEING A VALUED CONTRIBUTOR

TO SHOW SOCIETIES,  
RURAL BOARDS AND  
AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEES.



INITIATIVE OF



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**AGRICULTURAL SHOWS AUSTRALIA (ASA) EMERGING LEADERS EXISTS TO PROVIDE THE SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE REQUIRED BY YOUTH COMMITTEES IN THE SHOW MOVEMENT.**

ASA Emerging Leaders is particularly focused on the state bodies as, more often than not, the young members of these committees are experiencing their first role as a board or committee member or chair in newly established organisations.

One of the primary ambitions of the entity is to provide 101-level advice on what it means for the next generation – the future of agricultural shows – to meaningfully contribute to agricultural and rural committees.

Leaders in Australia's rural and agricultural sectors have shared their advice on topics pertinent to accomplished, successful committees, with the intention to equip the next generation of leaders in the show movement across Australia with the resources and support they need to find their voice, understand their responsibilities, and succeed so that in turn the show movement prospers.

As a future leader in our industry reading this, I hope you find it candid, useful and inspiring.

**Dr. Rob Wilson**  
**Chairman - Agricultural Shows Australia**



## MEET THE SIX SERIOUSLY ACCOMPLISHED AGRICULTURAL LEADERS WHO SHARED CANDID WISDOM

### CATHERINE MARRIOTT OAM

Catherine Marriott received a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2022 for her work in promoting primary industry and regional development – and it's not hard to see why.

She has 20 years experience working in management, consulting, governance and leadership in the agribusiness sector in Australia and throughout Asia. Catherine is an advisory board member at Rural Bank, chair of the RWA Victoria Alumni, chief executive of Riverine Plains, board member of the Local Land Services, and board director of Rangelands Natural Resources Management.

Catherine has had vast and incredibly diverse roles throughout her career, and all have been driven by a desire to make an impact and contribution. She has a particular fondness for rural, not-for-profit boards, describing them as an extremely rewarding space to contribute.



### JOHN BENNETT

A familiar face at the Sydney Royal Easter Show, John Bennett served as the ringmaster for six years at the largest ticketed event in Australia. He remains the chairperson for the Sydney Royal Horse Show Committee today, and is Vice President of the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW.

John was president of Nowra Show Society for five years, and is a Trustee of the Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth, having previously held the position as its Next Generation Facilitator.

John joined the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW Youth Group in 2005 and was elected to Council in 2009.



### DANICA LEYS

Danica Leys is the chief executive officer of the Country Women's Association of NSW, and is a familiar face on ABC program, The Drum.

Danica is an appointed board member on the Greater Sydney Local Land Services board, and board member of the New South Wales Council for Women's Economic Opportunity. Danica founded AgChatOz and was the former Policy Director – Environment at NSW Farmers' Association.

She holds a Bachelor of Agriculture (Honours) and a Bachelor of Law, is an admitted solicitor in NSW, and has completed the Australian Institute of Company Directors course.



### JOCK LAURIE

Jock Laurie is the chairman of Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) and has been on the board of AWI since 2015.

He and his family have a farming business that produces wool, lamb, beef and grain on properties in Walcha, Bendemeer and Gunnedah in New South Wales.

Jock is also a past president of the National Farmers Federation and the NSW Farmers Association.

While he's got a string of leadership accolades to his name, they've evolved organically over the years. A self-described introvert, Jock left school at the age of 16 to work on the land, and had no intention of becoming involved in committees or boards, but a desire for policy change led him down a leadership path.

He's an outspoken advocate for the power of hard work, respect, empathy, and knowing what you bring to the table, regardless of whether you have formal qualifications or not.



### TOM GREEN

Tom Green is a farmer from Forbes, New South Wales. He is the chairman of Lachlan Valley Water and the director and treasurer of the New South Wales Irrigators Council.

He is the former vice president of Forbes Pastoral, Agricultural and Horticultural Society, and former leader of the Royal Agricultural Societies of the Commonwealth Next Generation. Tom is also a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors course.

Tom's committee life started with the Forbes Agricultural Show at the age of 16, where he went on to become the vice president of the Forbes Show Society.

Hailing from a farming family who were also members of Lachlan Valley Water, Tom found himself in his current role as Lachlan Valley Water chairman after he jokingly had "too much to say" as a young irrigator in the region. That was nine years ago.



### ANNA SPEER

Anna Speer is a senior business leader with more than 15 years experience in leadership positions in the agribusiness sector. Today, she is the chief executive officer of one of Woolworth Group's newest divisions, Greenstock, the company's dedicated red meat division.

Anna is the former chief operating officer of Australian Agricultural Company, chief operating officer of AuctionsPlus, director of Agribusiness Australia, and general manager of Livestock Exchange. Anna is also a member of CSIRO Future Protein Mission's advisory group.

Anna is a graduate of the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, the Australian Institute of Company Directors, and the University of Sydney's Global Executive MBA program.





# CHAPTER ONE

RECIPE FOR A SUCCESSFUL COMMITTEE



## TIP: KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BOARD, AN EXECUTIVE

**Being aware of the delineation between board and operations is crucial. When boards micromanage and become murkily involved with operations, the result is a frustrated and uninspired management team.**

The operations or management arm of any entity is tasked with enacting a strategy the board sets. Their remit includes staff management, reporting, the daily operations – that's the role of the leadership of an organisation. The board or committee's responsibilities focus on setting strategies, establishing organisational key performance indicators and managing risk. The board must stay at arm's length from the operational aspects of the entity.



## TIP: DEFINE THE STAKEHOLDERS, MISSION AND WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Both the board and the management team should have a firm grasp on who their stakeholders are. Are they farmers? Communities? Showgoers? Volunteers? Is the organisation's mission about exposing people to a career in agriculture? Is it a focus on creating social connections? Is it about making money? A board needs to clearly understand and define this so that management and operational teams can enact and deliver on the strategy they've pitched.

**It is also useful for boards to define what qualifies success so that the operational team can achieve it.**





## TIP: KNOW WHY YOU WANT TO BE INVOLVED

Whether you're on a show society, agriculture committee, or community organisation, the entity is bigger than you.

You need to come to a board or committee with a sound understanding of why it is that you want to be involved and what you intend to contribute. Whether it's to increase attendance and partnerships at agricultural shows by the end of your tenure, or building connections between regional businesses, or to build sustainable revenue streams, know what your intention is.

***"Be really conscious of this because if it's around chasing a title or having an ego to say that 'I'm a boss person because I sit on the board' disposition, I would really question the value that you can add." – Catherine Marriott***



## TIP: ALLOW INTROVERTS TO CONTRIBUTE

If you don't hear from all members of your committee, you're missing out on the best pool of ideas, opinions and insights. We've all sat through meetings dominated by the same voices. What they have in volume, they lack in the richness of diversity. Here's how to scale back some voices, and turn others up:

- **Set the agenda early.** Ensure the agenda is set at least a week beforehand. It gives the introverts time to think, plan and research what they're going to say, making them more comfortable to contribute.
- **There's power in the pause.** If you're the chair, announce a pause for a few minutes to allow everyone to gather their thoughts. This gives introverts the opportunity to articulate their opinions in a considered way.
- **Be actively inclusive.** Not the chair? There's many rules around board governance but the term you're looking for here is "through the chair". Example; "Through the chair, I'm wondering if [committee member A or committee member B] had anything that you would like to share with us?" It seeks permission from the chair, while reminding them in a gentle way of people who may have been overlooked.



## TIP: DON'T OVERPLAY YOUR HAND

Enthusiasm and energy is essential for the continuation of agricultural committees, but beware you don't burn bridges with it.

"Some of those old long timers get pretty offended if the upstarts come in and try to sort of rule the world straight up," Jock says. "I have seen regularly people get into meetings and think they need to make an impact. You do not need to make an immediate impact. Have confidence in your ability to have a lasting impact, first sit back and understand the issues."

When you enter a committee, take the time to understand the different personalities and how your chair operates. Where do you fit in? Where are the people with both the same and opposing views as you? Why are they opposed to your views? Is your thinking right or wrong? You can only find the answers to these questions once you sit back, observe, and listen.

***"Don't be like a little puppy let off the leash for the first time and just go mad." – Jock Laurie***

When it comes time to speak, go in prepared. Read your board papers top to bottom and know what you're trying to achieve. Whether it's to change the direction of debate, or support it completely, your conduct and delivery will change accordingly. To speak clearly, and be understood, you must first fully understand the issues - and that starts with being entirely across the agenda and board paper.

You don't need to be the best or most elaborate wordsmith. Short and sweet does the trick, Jock says. Brevity served him well in his regular government meetings during his time with New South Wales Farmers.

***"One day the minister said to me 'Jock, there are 50,000 words in the English language and you only need about 10 to tell me what you want. I wish everybody who came in here did the same thing'." Jock says.***





## TIP: FIND A SHARED PURPOSE

The most powerful place to start on any committee is by finding a common purpose that every committee member agrees on. It's an incredible leveller and brings people together.

Shelve the ego, ditch the power play, and you'll find that's where the magic happens – just as Catherine Marriott shares from her experience working in the Kimberley, Western Australia.

“We had an issue where cattle were getting out on the road, people were hitting them at night and being killed. The pastoralists were hating the tourists, the traditional owners were the pastoralists, the Department of Lands was hating the Main Roads authority, who was hating the Council and the police.”

“I got them all in a room and said ‘Rightio team, if you come here with your own ego or your own sense of who is in the right and wrong, you're out. But, can we all agree that we are here to keep cattle and people safe on the Kimberley roads?’ And everybody in the room agreed on that.”

**“Getting everyone to agree on a singular purpose is an incredible leveller and it brings people together.” – Catherine Marriott**

While she admits to being surprised, Catherine says the most difficult person in the room ultimately came up with the solution. Everyone dropped their own agendas and approached the situation with a solutions focus; a crucial aspect in working through any conflicting conversations.



## TIP: APPOINT A GREAT CHAIRPERSON

Your chairperson is critically important. The tapestry of differing personalities, introverts, extroverts, will all be stitched together by your chair.

A good chair skillfully calms excited, dominating personalities, while guiding quieter ones to the forefront to ensure proper, thorough, and respectful debate. They will manage and support people, while keeping a close eye out for any manipulation or political games.

They will ensure processes and procedures are respected and followed. They will facilitate robust debate, without allowing disrespect to enter into it. It's a complex role and one every chair will carry out differently.

Work with your chair, build a relationship with them, and other members; understanding their backgrounds and perspectives while they, too, take the time to understand yours.

And if you don't personally gel with your chair? Respect them anyway. There will always be a time when chairs change, and the opportunity will arise for you to make revisions and suggestions on who is on that seat and how they conduct meetings.



## TIP: CURIOSITY LEADS TO BETTER COMMUNICATION

Want to be a better leader, better committee contribution, better director? Stay curious. When you're curious on a board or committee, you're in a learning state and it's only while you're learning that you can improve.

Differing opinions and ideas are valuable, and while they can also lead to difficult situations, when you approach them with a genuinely curious mindset it's impossible to be judgemental. It's not easy and that's why good leadership is so valuable, but taking the time to welcome varying opinions and expressing the value in difference is crucial.

**“One of the biggest gifts that you can give to people who have different opinions is to not be threatened by that, but be curious and ask them questions.” – Catherine Marriott**

Being on a board is a team game and if you approach topics with curiosity, rather than in an acrimonious or adversarial way, the team succeeds.



## TIP: A COMMITTEE THAT AGREES UNANIMOUSLY IS DANGEROUS

You are never going to have a committee where everyone agrees on everything, nor should you aspire to. In fact, Catherine argues there's nothing more dangerous than a committee that all agrees. If you are agreeing with everyone in your committee, you are not doing the best job that you can. You need diversity of opinion to reap the biggest benefit. Get comfortable with conflicting conversations to become a great leader.

Communicate early and often. Remember, if you're sitting in a committee meeting unsure of something – so is someone else. Speak up, ask questions, stay curious.



## TIP: KNOW WHEN TO FOLD ‘EM

When you go onto a board or committee with a goal in mind of what you want to contribute, you've also then got to have an exit point.

Experience and longevity on committees and boards is invaluable, but so too is youth and vibrancy. Recognise when it's time to hand over the reins. Sometimes you may choose to exit to make room for new faces, ideas, and energy. Other times it may be when your purpose and values are no longer aligned with the broader board.

Being associated with committees and boards is a role of incredible legal responsibility, so if the personal risk to yourself becomes too great in a board that is no longer operating credibly, it's time to step off.

Have a personal succession plan in place. Whether it's because it no longer brings you joy, or the demands of other commitments mean you have to let something go, it's important to know when to walk away.



## TIP: FIND A MENTOR

In the best possible way, a mentor has nothing to gain from your relationship. They only have your best interests at heart. It doesn't have to be a formal process, it could be as simple as having a chat at your local agricultural show with someone who you admire and respect.

If you can run your ideas past them, ask for their opinion on a matter, and receive their frank and honest input, that's a valuable mentor to have in your pocket.

Even with her incredible wealth of experience and knowledge, Catherine still regularly communicates with her team of 15 mentors. Each brings their own perspective and value. Sometimes it's not what you want to hear, which is exactly the point.

"I used to go to my mentor and I'd think, 'David's definitely on my side this time,'" Catherine says. "And I'd ring him and I'd say, 'David, this guy or this girl is doing this or that' he'd listen and say, 'Isn't that fascinating, Catherine? I wonder why they're doing that?'"

"That line of questioning nearly always works because you gain empathy and you start to understand where people are coming from."



## TIP: UNDERSTAND YOUR ISSUES

***"It's very easy to talk about your issues, but the best advice I can give is to shut up until you fully understand them." – Jock Laurie***

Whether you're new to a committee or show society, or have a few years under your belt, it's important to gain a thorough grasp of an issue before you dive in.

Talk to your chair and other committee members before and after meetings, read your papers, and go in prepared so you're not only fully informed and confident in your next move, but your credibility remains intact.

Once you understand your issue completely, determine exactly what you want to achieve in your outcome. And while it's easy to get tunnel vision in your quest for change, it's just as important to understand the varying personalities, viewpoints and experiences of your fellow committee members and what they want to achieve. Ease in, take your time, and engage in respectful, healthy debate.



## TIP: A COMMITTEE WITHOUT TRUST AND RESPECT IS A SINKING SHIP

You cannot make a committee work if people cannot hold confidence. People will not feel comfortable contributing if they fear repercussions of misquoting outside of committee meetings. Ethics around this need to be unbreakable.

Trust between people in the committee and the board is crucial. It's the foundation to effective debate, disagreement, and constructive feedback. The consequence of not having trust in the committee is the committee won't operate. It will not deliver, it will not achieve, and it will not survive.

Consideration and respect are not to be confused with meekness – you can, and should have very forthright discussions and arguments – but it can always be done in a respectful manner.

"It's really critical that if you want to maintain any sort of credibility in this game that you're seen as being an honest person, that you're not seen as being a bully."  
– Jock Laurie

The whole purpose of debate in committees is to sit down and be shifted one way or another. Genuinely listen to input, and while you don't have to agree, you need to have the ability to shift space.

***"You've got to be prepared to stand up and say, 'you've won me over and I'm actually prepared to support that position'." - Jock Laurie***







# CHAPTER TWO

## GETTING GOVERNANCE RIGHT



### TIP: UNDERSTAND WHAT GOVERNANCE IS

***“You need to think of the organisation that you’re a part of as an orphaned child that you are now legally responsible for.” – Tom Green***

Governance is the system by which an organisation is controlled by how it operates and how people are held to account in that organisation.

The constitution is the legality of why and how an organisation exists. For agricultural show committees, the core ‘why’ is for the benefit of agricultural competition and excellence. That’s your purpose, your why.

“You need to think of the organisation that you’re a part of as an orphaned child that you are now legally responsible for,” Tom Green explains. “It can’t make decisions for itself. And it can’t explain the decisions you make on its behalf.”

Risk management, ethics, legal compliance, administrative matters; they’re all elements of governance, and committee members have a responsibility to be informed on all issues, regardless of their role.

You may not be the treasurer, the chairperson, or the executive, but good governance is knowing where the money is going and understanding the financial statements. If you don’t, ask questions and find out.

If something goes awry, you’re in the box seat with everyone else. You’re one of the legal guardians of the orphan. Take care of it, know it, understand it, be curious about it and don’t accept that “that’s just the way we have done things in the past”.



### TIP: UNDERSTAND YOUR FIDUCIARY DUTIES

One of the most important concepts, particularly for not-for-profit boards, is around fiduciary duties. A fiduciary duty is the implied understanding that you have the best interests of your organisation at heart and, as such, you do not bring self-interest into a committee. Understanding your role as a board director, chair, or committee member in administering the fiduciary duties of your organisation is paramount.

You must disclose any possible conflicts of interest at the beginning of the meeting or as soon as a topic is broached where you have overlapping interests, real or perceived. It is highly recommended that you abstain from those discussions.



## TIP: REMEMBER WHAT HAT YOU'RE WEARING

As you move between various committees and boards, roles and positions, the hat you wear will keep changing – but you need to keep your fellow committee members aware of which hat you're wearing at each meeting.

A conflict of interest is something we want to avoid, and learning when to make a declaration is important.

Are you employed by a company sponsoring a show? Declare it. Are you being interviewed by the media on a particular topic? Understand why this request is being made of you personally. If it's because you have authority to speak on behalf of your organisation? If so, remember that and ensure you keep the opinions of your organisation in focus, not your personal ones.

If you're not sure what hat you're wearing, ask someone. It's always more beneficial to flag it, rather than have it questioned or noted down the track that you benefited from this decision personally or financially without first declaring it.



## TIP: LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

Whether you're starting a new entity or reinstating one, getting it right from the beginning will impact the long-term success of that entity.

Be very clear about what kind of entity you're wanting to get off the ground. Is it state or national? This standing will take a very different pathway from a governance point of view.

If you can, seek legal and accounting advice to help set you up correctly. This can save you time and headache not only now, but in years to come.

Depending on the type of entity you're establishing, you may be required to approach people to be part of your inaugural board. Take the time to consider what each person will bring to the table, but don't be afraid to approach someone you consider unattainable. You might just be surprised. Your board will have a huge bearing on the success or otherwise of your entity going forward, so aim high.



## TIP: MINUTES MATTER

If there's anyone who's seen their fair share of meeting minutes, it's Danica Leys. There are 370 Country Women's Association branches in New South Wales, and she's seen minutes range from almost non-existent in their concision to essay-length form in their detail and length. Danica describes good minute-taking as an art-form, and one that improves with practice. Good minutes start with four foundations;

- **Clear and understood.** Minutes need to be an accurate and true reflection of the decisions that went on in the meeting. It is a document that someone who hasn't been in the meeting can pick up, read and understand what went on in the meeting, and what decisions were made.
- **Smart summaries.** Minutes don't need to be word-for-word transcript, but they also need to be more than a few scratchings on a piece of paper. They need to succinctly capture the sides of the debate, the actions and the background to the decision.
- **Context counts.** Add context to help future members understand matters discussed. This is particularly important around policies put into place. Document the reasons why the policy exists. It may still be changed in the future, but it gives committee members a base to formulate their decisions .
- **Actions itemised.** Include a separate action list that lives meeting to meeting. It documents the actions decided on and who is responsible for enacting it. Bring it out at each meeting to determine if the idea has been actioned and if it needs to be carried on.

Immaculate meeting minutes sent out to every person on the email list with not a spelling mistake in sight every time? It's not going to happen.

***"I think near enough is good enough, give up on the idea of perfection," - Danica says.***



## TIP: MISTAKES HAPPEN. RECORD THEM, DON'T COVER THEM

In the wise words of Tom Green – it's inevitable that something somewhere on every committee will go wrong, but it's usually not the end of the world.

Through good governance, the policies, procedures and processes will be in place to flag mistakes or mishaps. Due diligence ensures the legal frameworks are followed and issues are less likely to arise down the track.

Whether it's financials and the varying levels of authority each individual has over them, or an organisation's communications policy, good governance is knowing the ins and outs, when to record mistakes, and how to ensure they're less likely to occur in the future.



## TIP: THE TRENCHES AREN'T GLAMOROUS, BUT THEY'RE IMPORTANT

Not everyone can post the fun reels on Instagram. We can't all be whipping up swanky new websites. But every role in a committee is crucial for good governance.

In particular, the role of secretary is one that you won't often find people leaping out of their seats to take on. In some respects, it's even more difficult than the president's position. The workload is considerable, from minutes to action lists, to the time involved in preparing for meetings.

But it's also one of the most integral roles to really understanding what it is that your committee or board is working on, and aspiring towards. It affords you intimate knowledge of a wide scope of issues, and it's a role Danica urges everyone to consider.



## TIP: INVEST IN TRAINING

From meetings to financial reports, there is a host of governance training available to boards and committees across Australia.

Tom, Danica, Catherine and Anna have completed the Australian Institute of Company Directors course, widely considered to be the gold star course of its kind in Australia. There's no denying it's an expensive option, but there's several alternative options available and both Tom and Danica encourage committees to support its members in undertaking any governance training available, wherever possible.

"Formal training makes it very clear about why you're here, what you need to do, but also how to think like a director or a committee member and step back when you need to," Tom says.

Whether you're new to a committee or board, or have been on it for a period of time, training allows you to gain more ideas, receive up-to-date and relevant information, and share your experiences with others in similar positions.



## TIP: THERE'S NO SILVER BULLET FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE

***"You're never actually going to have that perfect equilibrium where everything's fine." – Danica Leys***

Even with all the checks and balances, processes and procedures in place, governance ultimately comes from people, and people are exactly that – human.

"For me, I've given up on the idea of work-life balance," Danica says. "It's actually knowing that it's a bit of a pendulum and sometimes it swings a bit to the work or the volunteer side of things. And sometimes it'll swing back to the family side of things.

"As long as that pendulum is actually swinging back and forth and isn't just entrenched in one side or the other for too long, then that's okay, but you're never actually going to have that perfect equilibrium where everything's fine."



# CHAPTER THREE

## BECOMING A BRILLIANT LEADER



### TIP: BE ON TIME

There is no better way to distinguish yourself as a leader than to be on time. It's one of the simplest and fastest ways to grow as a leader.

Being punctual shows those you lead that you're dependable, trustworthy and you respect them, their time, and their presence.

***"If you've got 15 people in a room and you start two minutes late, that is 30 minutes of time you have wasted, not two minutes. It's the cumulative effect. There is nothing worse than a leader who is not on time and who doesn't start things on time."* – John Bennett**

Punctuality is a commitment to do what you promised at the time you promised to do it. You're either on time or you're not – there's no grey area.



### TIP: UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WANT TO BE A LEADER

With energy in spades and a fear of missing out, Anna joined committees and boards left, right and centre early in her career– but that's not what should motivate you as a leader, she cautions.

"As I've gotten older, had kids, and become even more time poor, I've realised how important it is not to do something just for the kudos, the tickets, or because you don't want to miss out," Anna says. "And that's certainly been a growth opportunity for me over the years."

Be very clear on why you want to be a leader and why you want to participate in your show committee to ensure that you make a positive contribution.





## TIP: 'DON'T BEND THE RULES OR THE RULES WILL BEND YOU'

A pearl of wisdom passed straight down from John Bennett's father, and one he still lives by today.

"When I finished as ringmaster at the Sydney Royal Easter Show after six years, I hoped that I finished being known as someone who was a stickler for the rules," John says. "If that happened, I'd be very happy."

Rules provide a valuable support structure and backing to all decisions made at a show society meeting and in the show ring. Being questioned about your call? You don't make the rules, you just enforce them.

Of course, sometimes a show society will need to reevaluate and recreate its rules, but the time to do it isn't show day. Policy change on the run is a recipe for disaster. It leads to a subpar outcome and undermines the strong future a committee could've co-created together.



## TIP: BE ORGANISED AND RESPECTFUL

Attending a meeting without having read the papers, or speaking up on issues already documented but obviously not read by the speaker, is not just a waste of time, but frustrating and disrespectful to your fellow committee members.

A considerable amount of time goes into preparing papers for meetings. Show that you respect the effort – something as simple as a few post-it notes on points of interest for you with pre-prepared, insightful questions shows you've delved into it and are committed to proceedings.

On the flip side, consider how you as a leader can help set others up for organisational success and ensure meetings are more efficient. Could you put into place a phone call system seven days out from a meeting, and another one three days out? Could you provide tools such as audio readers so people can consume information from a PDF on the run?

Ultimately, committee members need to demonstrate personal leadership but a few prompts from the chair and sage advice on how to prepare could be time well invested to create the change in behaviour you seek.

Small changes to organisational behaviour can make a significant difference to the outcome of committee meetings.



## TIP: ENSURE YOUR VALUES ARE ALIGNED

In addition to clarifying why you're getting on a board or committee, spend time finding out who else is on that committee.

Take the time to find out the chairperson's values, goals and core purposes. Their values will become core to the culture, the "how we do things around here" if you will. If you reach that day and realise they don't align with yours, relationships and situations can very quickly erode.

Take the time to understand the perspectives, opinions and backgrounds of your fellow committee members. Just as people's values change, so too can the values of a committee or board. Aligned decisions from diverse opinions result in real change and transformation. Understand whether your values or opinions will be driving positive change or bringing it to a halt.



## TIP: NOT ALL LEADERS ARE BORN LEADERS

Some people rise to the occasion because that's just who they are. Others will become leaders through determination, experience and tenacity. John falls into the latter category.

A former 'petrified public speaker', John still clearly recalls the heart-pounding, anxiety-inducing moment he stood before a crowd of 120 people at his first RASC conference in 2004 and asked a question of the guest speaker. It took every ounce of grit and determination. It felt like 'the worst thing ever'. But he did it.

"Work on what you're not good at, if it's holding you back," John says. "Bit by bit, with perseverance I've become comfortable with public speaking. Not all leaders are born leaders – there's work to be done."

Whether it's public speaking or understanding your committee's financials, good leaders continually upskill, learn, stay curious, practice, and perfect.



## TIP: CONNECT WITH THE PEOPLE YOU ARE LEADING

It's easy to lead people you like, and people that you like. What's hard is to lead people whose opinions differ to yours, who have differing personalities, differing backgrounds. But they will be on every committee, and every committee is richer for it.

Make a concentrated effort to stay in touch with every single person on your committee. Taking the extra step to talk and connect individually with people never goes unnoticed.

John recalls asking his local MP who was the best leader she'd worked under in her 17 year political career. Her response? John Howard. She revealed that every month he would personally call every one of his MPs – more than 75 in total – to connect with them and check in on what was happening in their region. The impact wasn't forgotten by the MPs, and the lesson hasn't been forgotten by John Bennett who continues this practice in his role as horse committee chair at the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW today.



## TIP: HAVE FUN ALONG THE WAY

We need to ensure our organisations are viable and strong well into the future, but if we're not having fun, we're missing out.

It's very easy to get caught up in the pressures of your local show, and there are certainly more than a few of them. But there's not many people out there who want to come straight from the stresses of their work or home life, and jump into more on their show committee.

Be professional and respectful, but a little lightheartedness can go a long way in a committee meeting.



## TIP: OBJECTIVE OBSERVATIONS

The show committee environment can be loud – don't be tempted to become the empty vessel that makes the most noise, Anna cautions.

Having spent time on countless boards, Anna focuses on becoming an objective observer. When you consciously unattach yourself from the outcome, no matter how attached you are, you're able to give people the space to explain their intentions or thoughts.

Often, you'll find you're either fighting for the same goal framed differently, or you're given the opportunity to share your opinion in a way that opens the door for someone to step across and change their mind. If you go in hard with someone who is set in their opinion, you will find you get that rigidity in response. Go in with genuine curiosity and empathy, and you will be rewarded with a bend or shift.

"It's tough but we've been given two ears and one mouth, use them accordingly," Anna says. "Be curious and ask really good questions. And a good question is not a statement."



## TIP: PUT PEOPLE, INCLUDING YOURSELF, FIRST

Anna's day job is heavily based in operations, but Anna directs 90 per cent of her energy toward her team. Why? Without people, you've got nothing.

She advises modeling the behaviour she wants her staff to employ - including having respect for their down time. While you can talk the talk, Anna says you need to walk the walk too. Living the right balance of commitment to the organisation versus personal lives, so people mirror the expectations you set.

"You might be saying 'no of course I don't expect you to respond to email at ridiculous times at night' but if you're sending them at that time of the night, you are setting the expectation for people to copy you," Anna says. "And that's when you start burning people out."

**"A wise person said to me 'you need to make sure that you don't make this job so big that no-one wants to take it over after you'." – John Bennett**

Similarly, it's crucial you don't forget your own oxygen mask. It helps you, and in turn helps others. In his pursuit to become the best president Nowra Show had ever seen, John soon realised he was shooting himself, and the society, in the foot.

"A wise person said to me 'John, you need to make sure that you don't make this job so big that no-one wants to take it over after you'."



## TIP: PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

Working alongside and leading a large committee of people with multiple ideas, experiences, and backgrounds is never going to be easy.

There may be a reason we've always done things the way they're done, but that doesn't mean change is impossible. It won't happen overnight though.

"But as they say, pressure makes the diamond," Anna says. "And as you work through that, you will get good opportunity options and outcomes if you're patient."

Approach every situation with authenticity and humility – after all nine times out of 10, most people in the room are thinking the same thing, so be brave, be vulnerable, and ask the questions you, and everyone else, want to know.







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