



feature article



Alumni Advice and Wisdom

Lessons on Leadership from the Livestock

by Caprice de Lorm, MBA 2000

The paths that I have taken have led me to a variety of opportunities for learning about leadership. Each has brought its own distinct approach. I'd like to share what I have learned about leadership from my adventures working with cattle.

I work with the Oxen at Centennial Farm in Orange County, a 4-acre working farm at the OC Fair & Event Center. Oxen are cattle trained to work on a farm. Working with Oxen makes me a Drover, one who leads an Ox or a team of Oxen. I have led two teams of Oxen at Centennial Farm and have trained various cattle to "rope walk", which is to follow commands while being walked with a halter and rope.

What began as a way to give back to the community became for me something that was also personally rewarding. While learning how to drive Oxen, I enjoyed the added benefit of learning about leadership in a unique setting. And, as I have found, the leadership skills required to be a good Drover are those needed to be a good leader in business and a solid leader of oneself.

Below are lessons that I have learned from leading the Livestock at Centennial Farm.

- **Be Present for the Team:** When you are spending time with another or with a team, be present. Pay attention and stay outside of your head. When working with Livestock, being present allows the team, the Drover, and the public to be safe. It is obvious to cattle, as it is to people, if a leader is in their own head. Cattle won't follow when they do not trust the Drover, which is usually directly related to the Drover not paying proper attention to the Ox or the team. This is true for people as well.
- **Stay Focused on the Objective but Remain Flexible with the Tactics:** There is more than one path into the wash area, just as there are many ways to wash cattle. Being focused on the objective and not over managing the tactics enables each team member to find their way of contributing and being effective. Allowing individuals to enroll themselves in the project provides for greater pride in the outcome and maximizes the creative thinking of the group.
- **Know and Communicate when Process is Vital:** There are some procedures that are mandatory for success. These need to be identified and clearly communicated by leadership. Doing so will help the team connect to the cause and clearly understand the boundaries in which they can operate. Oxen count on being led and given clear indications of when to go, turn, and stop. Without this structure, they walk away and lead themselves. Human teams are similar, needing to understand the operating principles by which they can contribute while flexing their creative muscles.
- **Listen and Observe with the Goal of Understanding:** Oxen know if you are aware of what is going on with them. It is important to watch for cues from the cattle, especially in the early stages of training. If Oxen do not trust that a Drover is keeping them safe, they won't follow or they will act out. They may later remember that feeling of distrust and react accordingly, resulting in a slowdown of progress and results. People are the same. They know if they are not being heard or understood. They will not feel valued nor trust leadership and may become distracted from the objectives. This can result in a redirection of energy towards identifying problems instead of focusing on the deliverables. Listening and observing with the intent of recognizing what is there for the team enables the leader to connect the goals of the effort to the humanity of the group.
- **Operate with Integrity and be Authentic:** Sometimes visitors to Centennial Farm want special favors. They want to touch the face of the cattle or put their child on the back of the Ox. Sometimes the cattle want to go off and eat from a nearby tree or run around in the grass. While it may be easier to say yes, it is critical to lead with integrity. It is also important to be authentic with words and actions. Being in integrity with the project and authentic with communications is important for effective and credible leadership.
- **Give Feedback and Acknowledge:** Cattle are smart, observant, and affectionate. They are herd animals. They look for input regarding their standing with the Drover and their effect on the herd. Similarly, human teams operate as a whole and are impacted by the contributions of each individual. The tone of the leader often resonates throughout the group. If team members do not get feedback or acknowledgement, they may not be fully aware of their contributions and impacts on others or the project. Providing acknowledgment and feedback, especially from the standpoint of possibilities, reinforces teaming and sets the stage for future empowerment and results.
- **Be True to Your Style and Good to Your Soul:** You owe it to yourself and to those you lead to be enrolled in and dedicated to what you do. A leader with passion for the effort is inspirational to the team and innovative in generating possibilities. They "walk the talk" and motivate others with ease. The Oxen know when they are being led by one who has a passion for being with them and they thrive on the positive energy that comes from that condition. Being true to one's style and values enables a leader to be supportive of others.

I hope that some of these lessons resonate with what you have

learned through your journeys. The ability to grow as a leader arises from many opportunities, volunteerism being one avenue. I find that volunteerism offers another way to observe leadership practices. It also provides a forum for building new skills and strengthening existing competencies.

Through the exposures of my life, I have noticed that "gems" are everywhere. They can be found at work, in an MBA program, through volunteerism, at a social gathering, in a book, and so on. They may be in the form of lessons to be learned or in leaders to be discovered. There is no shortage of great ideas and wonderful people. I experience great satisfaction by working with teams where there exists authentic camaraderie, boundless creativity, and a seamless interaction of communications and tasks.

Wherever your paths may lead, I wish you extraordinary leadership.



Bill: An American Milking Devon Ox

Caprice de Lorm is a Pepperdine MBA Graduate. She is the owner of de Lorm Designs, a company specializing in creating out of the box marketing solutions for their clients. In addition to being an Oxen Drover at Centennial Farm, Caprice is a Founding Board Member of Humanity Unites and The Walk For Unity. For more information about Centennial Farm, please visit www.ocfair.com/ocf/CentennialFarm/index.asp. For more information about de Lorm Designs, please visit www.delormdesigns.com.



Pepperdine MBAs Win 2008 ACG Cup

Pepperdine MBA students Nivan Bhuta, Steve Dean, Nathaniel "Ned" Downes, and Anne Neumayr took first place in the final round of the Third Annual ACG-Los Angeles Southern California Cup Competition, earning \$6,000 in prize money. The investment banking case competition against four other Southern California business schools challenged the team to perform a valuation for a hypothetical company as consultants, evaluate an offer to purchase stock, and provide strategic alternatives to the owners.

Sponsored by the [Association for Corporate Growth Los Angeles \(ACG-LA\)](#), the competition is judged by local investment banking and valuation professionals. Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management outperformed MBA teams from UC Irvine, Chapman University, USC and California State University-Fullerton.

The most difficult aspect of the competition was the intense timeframe. "We had a week to prepare different valuations and put together the presentation and supporting materials," said Anne Neumayr, a student in Pepperdine's Fully Employed MBA program.



The Pepperdine team (from left) Anne Neumayr, Nivan Bhuta, Steve Dean, and Ned Downes, CFA

In addition to balancing work and school, teammate Ned Downes was also anticipating the birth of his second child. With his wife's expected due date on Wednesday, February 6, the team was unsure Downes would be available to present in the final round at Chapman University on Saturday, February 8. In the end, Downes was able to join the team, which paid off with the juried panel and how the team worked together when delivering their presentation.

"The judges appreciated that all four of us had participated in giving the presentation, and they noted that we had all contributed evenly," added Ms. Neumayr. "Our recommendation was clearly presented, and we balanced high level information with detailed analysis."

At their next breakfast meeting on February 20, ACG-LA will present the Pepperdine MBA team with the winning trophy. As for Ned Downes, he is both an ACG Cup champion and the proud father of a newborn son.