**The Worshipful Company of Farmers**

**The 2016 Advanced Course in Agricultural Business Management**

The Advanced Course in Agricultural Business Management (ACABM) is a powerful experience. There is good reason why little information on the detail of the course is released ahead of the three week experience. It means that all delegates, there were 18 in 2016, go in on a level playing field in terms of understanding. This is essential in developing a bond between the group and, by the time we had finished, what a bond it was!

Having three weeks away from work and home, I almost dreaded someone asking ‘so, what did you learn?’ when I returned from the course. I wasn’t sure that I could articulate it beyond ‘Focus, Confidence and Direction’ and I really didn’t think that was going to wash. But sat here now, just a few days after the course has finished, I have been surprised about how much of the intensive three weeks has sunk in and I have been able to articulate that to other people. I am now so much clearer about the agricultural economy generally, the future challenges and opportunities, what that means for me and the business I work in and various other related issues – the big picture stuff.

Whilst not being oppressively technical in its own right, the course encourages debate and understanding so there is plenty of technical knowledge that comes out of it. However, what most delegates will want to tell you about is ‘the journey’.

The journey is a fascinating one. These 18 strangers have to bond but this isn’t a forced process. Sat in a horseshoe arrangement whilst a speaker made a controversial point, it almost felt like we were ‘the board’. A team covering each other’s backs and working together. This flowed through the whole experience - in lectures, visits and socially. I was struck by the level of support that was offered to each other and the openness with which everyone approached it. Even the businesses which we covered in case studies were disarmingly open with us – much to our benefit and theirs.

Towards the end of the course, there is such a strong commitment and team ethic between the group that it might be easy to think we could have achieved this on our own. This in itself is another clever part of the course. The environment created by the team at the Royal Agricultural University, masterfully led by Professor John Alliston, is carefully structured. They enable a type of organic growth between the individuals but almost invisibly guide this process with a very expert but light touch.

What Professor Alliston and his team also achieved was to put a stellar list of speakers in front of us. Many of the big hitters in the industry were kind enough to give their time, not to lecture, but to discuss. We were made to feel equal amongst them and encouraged to debate points.

I would recommend this course to anyone and there are some specific people who I intend to recommend it to. Has it changed my life? Not yet. I don’t expect it to immediately and, writing this less than a week after the course has finished, I wouldn’t expect any reader to believe me if I said it had at this stage. Do I expect it to change my life? Yes. I have no doubt that I will look back on the course and remember that it gave me that Focus, Confidence and Direction which will put me on a different trajectory than the one I was on before.

I could reel off quote after quote that inspired thought and changed or challenged perception but perhaps the most relevant for businesses and individuals is*: In a volatile world, be the best that you can be*. This course will help you do that. But then, if you are reading this you are already the sort of person to be considering further personal development and that is the first step…..

**Roland Brown**

On behalf of the delegates of the 65th Worshipful Company of Farmers Advanced Course in Agricultural Business Management