Murray Watt

Hi, everyone. Sorry. You're all patiently waiting for me.

Anne Walters:  
Welcome, Minister.

Minister Watt:  
Oh, thank you.

Anne Walters:  
Thank you for coming.

Minister Watt:  
No, my pleasure. I'm sorry, I just had another teams meeting that ran slightly over time. So sorry for being a couple of minutes late.

Anne Walters:  
No, it's a pleasure to have you. Thank you so much for coming.

Minister Watt:  
No worries. Hi, Cathy. I can see you there.

Cathy McGowan:  
Hello, Minister. I can see you too. Are you in Queensland?

Minister Watt:  
I am. I'm in. I'm sort of in northern Australia. If you take it as far south as Brisbane.

Cathy McGowan:  
I'm in cold, cold, cold, cold. Victoria.

Minister Watt:  
Ah, I'm I'm sorry to hear that. Anne did you want me to kick get straight into it or?

Anne Walters:   
Yep, whenever you're ready. Thank you, Minister. That would be great.

Minister Watt:  
No worries. Great. Well, thanks. Uh, everyone for the opportunity to join you briefly today. Can I just begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land that each of us has gathered on today, wherever we're coming from around Australia.

It's a great privilege to be able to introduce someone who I've respected for a long time from afar, but I'm but I'm getting to know better, up close since taking on this role. And just before I introduce Cathy, can I congratulate you, through NAPCaRN in organising this series of speakers. I think it's a really terrific idea to expose, particularly emerging leaders, to people who have done it all before and are still doing it in Cathy's case.

I should also say, I as the minister, I really value the work that NAPCaRN is doing, building that plant biosecurity capacity, especially in northern Australia, is so vital. You may have seen I was in both the Torres Strait and Cairns a couple of weeks ago, and announced some more funding for plant biosecurity through NAPCaRN while I was up there. And I think all of you who live in what is really Northern Australia, as opposed to Brisbane, know better than me, that Northern Australia is such an important part of the country to take serious preparedness, action and response action for biosecurity. I've, you know, I've obviously heard over the years about the risks we face, particularly coming through areas like the Torres Strait, but also whether we're talking about similar areas in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. But having been up there again recently, it's very clear that we do need strong precautions around biosecurity coming in through the North and it is a potential gateway for diseases that we don't want in Australia and we need to keep keep taking steps to keep out. So thank you to all of you for the work that you do every day to really try to keep the country safe from those diseases, given the huge impact they'd have on our agriculture sector and our wider environment.

But as I say, my main role today is to introduce your first guest speaker in this, what looks like a really terrific series that's going to be happening in the future. And I see that, even beyond today I've seen some of the names of other speakers you've got coming up, and you've got a really great list to look forward to over the coming months. But Cathy is a fantastic person to have as your first speaker as I say, I've certainly watched Cathy in action over the years, I guess, particularly during her career in Federal Parliament, which I think started around, 2013, am I right about that Cathy? 2013 election?

That was really the latest in a long line of contributions that Cathy has made, to public debate and policy in Australia, particularly in the field of agriculture. I'll let Cathy take you through in a bit more detail, her background and experiences but, you know, Cathy's the real deal in terms of having genuine experience in agriculture, hands-on experience over a long period of time, in her on her own property, and she's got lots of family history in the industry as well. But one of the things that really distinguishes Cathy is that she's someone who always takes the opportunity to put forward ideas that will help the industry grow, that will help the communities that depend upon agriculture. And she's done that in a variety of ways, including, being the president of Australian women in agriculture for a period of time. Of course, being a federal member of parliament and playing a really important role as an independent member, not getting caught up in partisan politics but actually looking for solutions. And that was one of the reasons why I was really pleased to appoint Cathy as the new chair of AgriFutures - one of the federal research and development corporations.

Again, Cathy will probably give you a bit more on what AgriFutures does and what she's doing there. You probably all know that through the federal government there are about 15 different rural research and development corporations that are jointly funded by government and industry to undertake research and development and promotion of industries and AgriFutures is a bit different to most of them in that it covers quite a range of different sectors, typically smaller and emerging parts of the agriculture sector. But also something that AgriFutures has really focused on is the development of women leaders in agriculture. And I know that that's something that Cathy takes seriously and will want to do as well.

The only thing other thing I was going to say about Cathy, is that one of the reasons I appointed her as the Chair was Cathy's got a very long track record of understanding and advocating for the issues around climate change as they affect agriculture. I know that was a key part of Cathy's campaign when she first ran for federal parliament and remained the case. And we've had a number of discussions since she's taken on the role of AgriFutures chair about what more we can be doing in that space. I guess that's kind of relevant to the activities more broadly of NAPCaRN and its members, because we all know that one of the reasons Australia faces more biosecurity challenges than we have in the past is climate change, that is one of the issues that's causing increased biosecurity risk. And, you know, I think you've all seen that there has been a change in approach at the federal level around climate change since the change of government last year, and I'm really determined as the Agriculture minister to make sure that we've got a federal policy platform that recognises the very real impact that climate change is having on agriculture and both the risks and opportunities that come with that. And I, as I say, I've had some good discussions with Cathy about that. I know that that's something that she intends to pursue as the chair of Agri Futures, and I'm sure that that's something that she'll probably touch on today if I know her half as well as I think I do. Cathy's an outstanding Australian, I can't think of a better person to have as the first speaker so it's my great pleasure now to introduce someone who knows a hell of a lot more about agriculture than I do, and that's Cathy McGowan.

Cathy McGowan:  
Oh, Minister, can I just say thank you? Next time I'm applying for a job. Can I have you as a referee, please? That was lovely. So I'll get into it if I could. Anne, if that's right.

Today, in starting this series of speeches, Anne's asked me to talk about some very specific things she's asked me to inspire you and to encourage you in your work and particularly encourage you in your leadership and also in being effective. So that's my task, and I'm really happy to do it.

And if there's anything I've learned in my career that can help you do your job better and more effectively, then I'm really, really pleased to do it. And I'm pleased to do it because it fits with my agenda. I'm not doing it just because I've got nothing else to do. I'm doing it because I, like the minister said, know how incredibly important Northern Australia is, and I want to get to know you. I'm hoping this is not the first and only opportunity. I'm hoping that following my talk, I'm going to talk for about 20 minutes, and with Anne's facilitation discussion, and then I'm hoping that, in my travels over the next period of time, as chair of AgriFutures, I can get to meet you and be useful.

Beginning with the end in mind, I'm going to start with my summary.

What are the main points that I want to share with you? Some of the key things that I've learned through my life, and then I'll come back and tell you some stories about those, and then provide a bit of a summary and then open it up for discussion.

But I, I really appreciate that I'm among equals today that, all of us know stuff. I know some stuff, so my job is to help us have the discussion that we can really get to share our knowledge between each other.

What are the four main points that I wanted to share with you today?

One is thinking about your own purpose and your own values and doing it early in your career. It really sets a guideline and helps you when things get tough.

The second thing I want to talk about is having goals and targets to provide a rudder in your life.

The third thing is knowing that other people know stuff and other people know collectively everything. Part of the art, is building your network and your team so that you can find the people who know stuff.

The other thing I want to really talk about is that very strong sense of being a seeker of knowledge. Becoming curious and how that works.

So they're my 4 themes. I'll come back to them at the end. You don't have to remember them, but I'll  
now tell you some stories that relate to that in my career.

So first off, I come from Dhudhuroa country which is Northeast Victoria. It's cold, it's rainy, it's wet, and I'm not in the north. Very early in my life I understood that I loved the environment that I was brought up into. I'm a daughter of dairy farmers. I'm one of a large family, and we absolutely belong in our community. I loved growing up. I loved being Dad's best helper. I love working with the calves. I love working with Mum on the veggie garden. I loved every bit of being my family life, I was just so blessed.

It didn't take me long to realise that when I grew up, I wanted to be like Dad, actually, which did create problems. I wanted to be a farmer. I wanted to grow things. I wanted to live in a community. I also wanted to be independent─I wanted to be my own boss, but I also knew I wanted to have an exciting life, I wanted to have lots of adventures. And that probably came from all those books that we read as kids. You know, mum and dad would just fill the house with books.

Once I got old enough and earned my first, paycheck as a teacher, I trained as a teacher, I set my mind to buying my own farm. And as I alluded to, everybody told me that as a girl, as a woman, you couldn't really do that and so that even made me more determined to do it. But I also wanted to live in the community that I grew up in. I wanted to come back. You know, I had gone to uni and done a little bit of travelling, but I wanted to buy the farm in the locality. I talked to Dad about it. He said, “No way, Jose, it's not going to work”. But my mother, god bless my mother, she said, “OK, why don't we go farm shopping?” So she set about, and most weekends I'd come home from teaching, and would go and she'd keep an eye out for farms that might work. And eventually, to my enormous surprise but delight, she heard that the farm across the valley from where I grew up, that the dairy farmer there wanted to sell off the hills. He wanted to keep the beautiful country in the bottom. Mum said, “Why don't we go and talk to Mr Johnson, the neighbour and see if he'll sell you the farm, his hill country?” and that's exactly what happened. He didn't actually only sell it to me, he sold it to my dad because he wasn't going to sell it to me and a whole big story, but eventually I ended up paying for it and buying it and running my own farm. And as I'm talking to you today, I look across the valley where I grew up, I'm now a farmer. I grow things. I'm independent, I'm not married and I don't have children. I do have a partner, but he lives a long way away, and I'm surrounded by a loving community. So that early goal setting, really worked for me. I was so pleased when people said, “Well, what do you want to do when you grow up?”, that I got helped to frame that question.

With that early start in life to give you a sense that I work from home, and I probably have for about 30 years. I have always had my office here, so was really pleased when we got internet, it was ADSL, very slow, came up the telephone line, but it enabled my office to work.

If we if we tick that one off, it was not only the setting the goals, it was as I bought the farm, I didn't have enough money, so I always had to work off farm. And the thing that I learned very quickly was that I was a woman farmer and I It was hard to be a woman farmer because all the models were men. I set about trying to go and learn how to be a farmer, and it was a really interesting thing because it involved me going back to uni.

My first degree was in arts, my second degree was a postgraduate degree in agriculture and rural development at the University of Western Sydney, and it was a fantastic degree. It was a hands on coursework - Masters, and it was designed for the New South Wales AG department for their extension officers. And they very kindly took in, people from Victoria. As part of that degree, we had to do a market survey, and where were the gaps in the market of our area of interest? My area of interest was women in agriculture, and where was the gap in the market?... was consultants working with women in agriculture, absolutely unheard of ─ it didn't exist. Through my study, and any of you doing an MBA or a Post grad, you have to come up with a practical project, so I did for my practical project, “Imagine if I ran a consultancy business for women in AG”. I learned so much through that master's degree that's that actually what I ended up doing when I finished my degree, I set up a consultancy business working from home, working with women like me who are interested in agriculture, or even women who weren't like me, women who had another career, but had fallen in love with, married a male farmer or a female farmer but mostly they were blokes. They moved from a business that they knew, like hairdressing or teaching to come and live on a farm. They just did not understand the culture. How does agriculture work? I don't just mean the growing of things─agricultural politics, How do you learn how to make money? How does leadership happen? What is the NFF? What is the Victorian? What's the Northern Territory farmers? Where does it all fit together? Over a number of years, me and some other friends, we set up - I set up my own consultancy company and then had connections with lots of other people. For 30 years, we ran a very effective and very, profitable consultancy company from home, but all around Australia working with women farmers - and I'm happy to come and talk about that a little bit more.

What was really lovely about that, is that part of my study was that a part of learning, what I learned at Hawkesbury was that people know stuff and if you can ask them, most of us, they tell you. So that was the beginning of my moving from being self contained, independent, minding my own business, scared to let people know what I thought to becoming an avid seeker of knowledge and networker and going to conferences, and then working out who I could talk with at a dinner, and how I could learn things. I was astounded by how willing and friendly and able people were, particularly in the consultants area, to help me out. So that got me to mid career I suppose - that was all going well.

As part of the consultancy work I have to say, I was able to feed my hunger for adventure. There wasn't much adventure in the Indigo Valley, I have to say, but I was able to get some consultancy jobs overseas, particularly in Ireland, Papua New Guinea and India, working with women in agriculture in those three countries and I'm very happy to talk a bit more about that later on. I just loved it─particularly Papua New Guinea. I had a very close relationship with Darwin and Northern Australia and the very strong links between northern Australia and PNG, and we worked with setting up a Papua New Guinea organisation called Papua New Guinea Women in Agriculture. And we had some terrific exchanges between Charles Darwin Uni and PNG and some very wonderful times out of that. So anyhow, that's an early stage of my life.

The thing is, I had a purpose and I was able to bring these very different ways together and live in the Indigo Valley where I live, be part of a community and have an exciting life.

Now the second thing I want to talk about is teams. It's impossible to do any of this by yourself. And I must admit I started out thinking I could be, I'd be the brave woman who'd go out and do it. It just wasn't going to work. So first off, I just briefly mentioned about buying my farm ─ couldn't do it by myself ─ the bloke wasn't going to sell it to me so I had to call in the family. And that worked. I was a reluctant one to start with, but it worked. In that first instance, the family came to my aid and we were able to do the very difficult personal negotiations. It wasn't only about money, it was about gender and a whole lot of other things, so the family came to my aid.

Then, as I wanted to learn about farming, I'd go to local farmers meetings, mostly all blokes. And that wasn't particularly productive. Then I started talking to my women farming friends and I discovered that I had them, that there were women farmers─lots of them. And I'd say, ‘Well, how do you do this? Or what do you do about that?’ And a group of us, then in the early 1990’s, formed this association called Australian Women in AG, because we weren't country women in that sense, we were farmers and we wanted to be part of farming, and we wanted to be part of politics, and we wanted to have our voices heard.

So we came together and formed a team of like-minded people called Australian Women and AG. Initially I was the secretary because I had a computer, and I could do things. Then I moved up the ranks, as you do to eventually as, the minister said, becoming the president. But in between I had every other job that you could possibly want in that organisation, as what happens and I have to say that, in my experience with professional work, I've always learned as much from my voluntary work as I had from my professional work. I learned about organisations I learned about chairing meetings. We would have these national board meetings (this was before the Internet) by phone, and we'd have 12 people and I'd be chairing the meeting by phone and that was a very complicated job, I have to say, but we managed it.

One of the things about Australian women in Ag is we also learned about events. We wanted to bring women together to get to know each other and the first and major event we organised was in Melbourne in 1991 we organised an international conference of ‘Women in Ag’.

We had over a thousand people come, and at the time it was the largest agricultural conference in Australia. Forget the women bit and we had women. We had women from 30 other countries attend. It was a magnificent and we all looked at each other and said, ‘Oh my God, we saw each other’. And it was such a surprise because we'd all been working in isolation. Not only did we see each other, we made friendships, many of which still last to this day.

That conference worked so well that the Americans who came out and said, ‘Oh, (as Americans do) we want one of those’. So in 1998 the Americans organised a conference, a ‘Women in Ag’ conference in America and we had one hundred and twenty five Australian women go to that conference. Anyhow, that went really well, and in 2003 the Europeans said, ‘Oh, we want one in Europe’. So we went to Spain and in 2003, the Spanish women hosted an international conference of Women in Ag and in 2005, the South Africans did as well, and then the steam sort of went out of it, the huff was gone, and the Indians were going to do one, but it didn't happen.

At each of those conferences, big groups of Australian women would travel overseas, and we would attach to it a trip. We would go and look at agriculture in other countries. And I have to say some of the most fun times of my life are these bus tours through, say, Northern Holland, looking at horticulture, uh, with a group of women and some of the blokes. Some of the blokes came as well, and we just had so much fun looking at ag, going on farms, going to research conferences, and we got funding out of the Research and Development Corporation to pay for these agricultural trips. Anyhow, I can talk a little bit more about that, but what it really did was showed me how important trade was. That Australia doesn't exist by itself, that every time we went to these international conferences, we could see how vitally important it was that we as farmers, understood trade. The teams got bigger and bigger and then those other countries would come to Australia. For example, the Irish women farmers, they came to Australia for a tour. The American women farmers came to Australia for tours, so we had these lovely relationships. Teams are really important and can be fun. You need team leaders, though. They don't just happen.

The next thing I want to briefly touch on is other people know stuff you have to ask. You have to ask because very few people voluntary tell you stuff. People are pretty polite. But if you ask them a question and they know you're interested, they'll share information with you. There's a number of ways I've found out to find out what other people know. I do courses. For a long time there in my mid career, I was just so hungry to learn stuff or wanted to make my consultancy business as good as it could be, but just because I wanted to know how things worked.

I did courses, for example, on facilitation, ‘How do you get a group to work?’. And that grew out of my need eventually, as chair of Australian Women in AG, ‘How do you facilitate a group? How do you become an effective chair? What can I learn from other people?’ And I have to say, I did lots of facilitation courses and those skills have stood me in such good stead, particularly when I got to parliament. I was really able to put a team together to facilitate a meeting, not to play politics, but to work out what we all had in common, and then help the group achieved its objective. I have to say were unusual skills in the federal parliament and they really worked to my advantage.

A second type of course I did─and I did lots because I had a lot to learn─was time management. I was always wanting to do things, but I couldn't work out how to be effective, and working from home, as I did often as a sole worker, there was just too much to do. So how could I become more effective in my time management? Certainly building teams and facilitating teams became a really important part of me being able to value add to my time. I did workshops on public speaking because I knew I wanted to convince people to do things differently and particularly in women in ag.

We would have conferences and someone had to be the guest speaker or the keynote speaker and ‘Cathy, would you do it?’ It wasn't really useful to say ‘Oh, no, look, I'm too scared of public speaking. I can't do it.’ I had to, and I wanted to learn, not only how to speak, but how to speak effectively and to be able to convince people that what I was saying was useful. So I did lots and lots of public speaking and it's still something that I pay a lot of attention to. When I was in parliament, looking for the really good public speakers and what could I learn from that? I'm a greater observer of oratory and how oratory can change people's minds and bring people with you.

I also did courses around leadership, and I want to just mention one of those courses was the Australian Rural Leadership programme ─ the ARLP. So I did that course. It was an eighteen month course and, applications are currently open. It's a national course for people who want to be leaders. You put a little bit of money in, and you get a scholarship that's worth almost $50,000. I did the ARLP, and it really polished up my leadership skills. It really helped me understand how politics works in Australia from an agricultural perspective and I was hungry to learn. They were some of the skills that I picked up along the way.

The final thing I want to say about, when you ask people questions, it's not as simple, it's not being greedy, there needs to be a generosity about it. You want to be able to have some reciprocity in it, give people something back. And again, I can talk a bit more about that in a minute, but I just want to give you one example of how that happened.

I was trying to, as part of my consultancy business, better understand how social media worked. I spoke to some of my younger nieces and nephews and said, ‘Look, guys, can you explain to me how Twitter works? I don't understand it.’’ And they said, Yeah, next time you're in Melbourne, come around, we'll have dinner and we'll teach you about Twitter’. That's really good. So I did that and they got some friends together and we had this meal and they were teaching me about Twitter, and we were also talking about life. What were they going to do with their life? Were they going to come home like I did and live in the Indigo Valley and have businesses? And here they said, ‘No, they weren't going to come back to the country, that they had left the country’. In Victoria, one of our biggest exports is young people. They leave the country, they go to Melbourne.

They said, ‘Well, why would we come back to the country? The public transport is terrible, the mobile phone coverage almost doesn't work, there's no Internet, there's no jobs, it's not exciting and no-one pays any attention to young people.’ And I have to admit it, when I heard that I was really shocked and hurt I think, and I thought, Oh that's terrible. I don't want to live and become an old lady on my farm. I want to be surrounded by that generation and their children. I want family to be part of my life.

Anyhow, the end of the story goes a couple of weeks after that particular dinner, one Saturday night I got a phone call, and it was from these young people and they'd been following up the conversation and they had worked out a solution to their problem. And the solution to their problem─and I'm going to encourage you to buy this book because it's called ‘Cathy Goes to Canberra’ and the story is all in there about how they said, ‘We think you need to become the independent member for Indi’, and I said, I don't think that's going to happen. Anyhow, they set about convincing me that it would be a good idea. And a year later, as the minister said, I got elected to parliament as an independent member of parliament, which was a surprise. I have to say, and I could talk a lot more about politics, but I'm not going to, because in my final minutes, I really want to come back and talk about you and leadership and how we can work together, because in the brief for this, Anne said that there's going to be a series of these talks and amazing people are going to come together.

I'm hoping that you can build a team. I'm hoping that there'll be time, maybe not in this one, but in the next one, where we could stop the guest speaker talking and we could have breakout rooms and everybody could go into a breakout room for a couple of minutes and introduce themselves to each other. I'm hoping that you can have an event. At events you can get together and share and talk and have ideas. I'm hoping that you can have learning outside the speakers. You can maybe learn facilitation skills, public speaking skills, advocacy skills. You can learn how politics can be influenced. You can learn how you can be more effective in making things better.

And I'm hoping that there will be opportunities for you to know how good you are. How really, already, what you're doing is fantastic, and how this becoming even better makes the whole country better. It's not a it's not an optional extra to have people like me become enthusiastic and encourage you. I'm doing it because I really, truly want us as a nation to be better. And I know we'll be better when we create good networks where we learn together, where we have a shared vision for how we want the country to be. And so that fits into what the minister was saying is, why is my role as chair of AgriFutures and I'll briefly finish here Anne and then we'll open up the questions.

AgriFutures has seventy-five staff, a lot of people, a budget of over fifty million dollars a year, which we spend on agricultural research and development. We've got projects in the Northern Territory. When we were last up there we were with Tom Duggan, Tom Hawkins. Tom, I've got your name wrong, I'll get corrected, but Tom took us out and he showed us the wild buffalo and the full supply chain of the wild buffalo from the catching to the taming to the, down to the wolves and then selling to Sumatra, that's one of our projects. Kakadu plums, horticulture, there's a whole lot of other projects that we work on. We'll be so much better if we can combine not only our research and development that AgriFutures does, but with the work and the knowledge and the networks that you have in your work. I'm really keen to be part of your network. I'm really keen to value add to your work. I made a commitment to Anne to be around for the longer term. It's not just a one off speech.

In summary, can I share with you what I know? Think about your purpose. Think about what you really want to do─It helps all the way through his life. Certainly it's helped me. Set goals and targets. Know that other people know stuff. Have a plan for finding out how you're going to get to know it. And finally, you don't have to do it all by yourself. The stronger your team is, and the better your connections, the more effective you're going to be. So with that final note, I'll pass it back to you, Anne, and we can have some discussion.

Anne Walters:   
Thank you very much. Cathy, that was wonderful. I really, really appreciate it. I particularly love the summary that you've given us. And also, I guess your thoughts around facilitation skills, which seems to have done some marvellous things for you in your career as well as the public speaking. I do want to open it up to anyone online.

Does anyone have any questions? I guess one of the first questions if I can jump in first Cathy, the question that I have is, I often, get feedback from people that one of the things that holds them back is maybe that they don't have the confidence. And I just wonder if that's something that you've ever felt yourself and whether and how you went about addressing that.

Cathy McGowan:   
I want to talk about the courage muscle in the answer to that question. Again I talk about it in the book. The courage muscle has been my most important muscle in my life. You don't just get to make big, important decisions like stand for Parliament, just because someone asks you. There's a whole lot of little decisions that you've made along your way that gets you ready for that big decision. And all through my life, I've found that I don't often make big decisions out of the blue. It's all the little decisions that I've made, and each one of those has made me more courageous, and with the courage, I get more confidence.

I started out small with my consultancy business, and then it grew. And the more courageous I was, in trying to make the consultancy business grow, the more courageous I was in going to a conference say of the dairy industry and saying, ‘Well, how about I can help you work with the women dairy farmers because there's only blokes here. If you want women to come, I could help you get more women in”. And they went ‘Oh, could you?’. Now, I didn't know I could, but I was pretty sure I could.

And so when I did it, I thought, OK, well, let's see if next conference we can have twenty women turn up. That seems possible. But it took a lot of courage to ring my ten women friends and say here I've said we could do it, do you want to come─to Australian women and ag women─Do you want to come to the conference? And they went, ‘Yeah, yeah, of course we do’. So and I thought, well, why was I scared? Of course they wanted to come. And in fact, we got fifty women to the next dairy conference, much more than the number. But I had to have the courage muscle in the first place of ringing up and being able to ask somebody to do something, knowing that I would give them something in return. So, to me, I think the more courageous I am, and the more bold I am, and the more I can ask other people to help me do things and then every single time they say yes, the more confident I get. And I have to say it constantly surprises me that my own limitation is my lack of courage. My own self talk which stops me being bold. What I often think to myself is I go to a meeting or a conference and say, OK, I'm going to set a task. Northern Territory Farmers. I see you're there, hello Paul, how many people am I going to introduce myself to? And I set a task - I'm going to introduce myself to five people a day. OK, so I'll have one before morning tea, one before lunch, two afternoon tea and one at the dinner. And by the time I've done that, I come home at night and go, well, that wasn't so hard. Let's see if I can be a bit bolder tomorrow. Let's try twelve people tomorrow. So that's what I find about confidence is it's related to how courageous you are, and courage is a muscle, and the more you use it, the better you get. And it's a bit like trying to get your arm strength up. You start on one kilogram and then move up to two and three. You don't start on ten. You don't start on those impossible things. You start small and move your way up. In conclusion, on that question, by the time I finished being a politician, I was a politician for six years, I was significantly more courageous at the end than I was at the beginning. But I couldn't have done what I did at the end If I hadn't have worked through all those little courageous steps in the way through. I had to do lots and lots of courage building and being brave. And then I got more and more confident. And the because the first speech I made in Parliament I was terrified, even though I'd done public speaking and I knew I could do it, I was so scared. And the first question I asked without notice, I was shaking. By the time I'd finished there, you know, I could speak on any topic without any preparation and do a good job. I could ask the prime minister any number of questions and then I was brave enough and confident enough to stand up in the middle and say, ‘Mr Prime Minister, on a question of order you haven't answered my question will you please go back’ And I'm going whoah that's Cathy McGowan from the Indigo Valley just called the prime minister to order. But it was lots of small steps and being courageous. And then the confidence grew.

Anne Walters:  
Wonderful, thank you Cathy that's a fabulous answer. I see that Darren Peck has his hand up. Darren?

Darren Peck:  
Thanks, Anne. Cathy, Darren Peck from the Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy. Thanks for an really inspirational talk. It was just fantastic, really, full of energy and really interesting, I guess my question is about, challenges in life. And we know that life is challenging. What are some of the things that you've learned through your life, whether it's your career or your personal life, that you've found helps you to overcome, develop the resilience that you need to overcome some of those challenges.

Cathy McGowan:  
Good day Darren, lovely to talk to you. One of those early courses I did was about, ‘When life goes to shit, what do you do? In that course, the teacher explained to us in a graph, you are born, and then basically, life goes up and down. She did this life cycle and, for example, you fall in love, you go up, you're with somebody for a little bit, and it goes down without fail. And then something happens like you have kids or you don't have kids, it goes up, then you get sick, and then your parents die. So life has these ups and downs. She explained that to us and when she did it that was news to me. I did not realise that life had peaks and troughs and everybody's life had peaks and troughs. And then some are going to be big and some are going to be little.

She then helped us actually have strategies for when it happens. She made us work through what's the strategy you're going to have in your life after you've fallen in love and the love tarnish has worn off. We weren't even in love, it had nothing to do with it, but she made us think through what are you going to do in those circumstances? And she made us think through, for example, when your parents get sick, that's going to be a downer, or your partner dies or your kids die, whatever it might be, these things will happen to you. And she made us forward think.

And then that linked me to there was some Buddhist people in that course, and they were talking about meditation and how important meditation was so that you can actually learn to know and understand your own emotions. If you've got a better understanding of your own emotion, when you go through these peaks and troughs, you can distance yourself a little bit and say, well, that's a circumstance. I don't have to be ruled by the circumstance. I've got a bit of control. So then I went off and did a whole lot of meditation and became much, much better at managing my own emotional well-being. Consequently, these two things work together. Now in my life, I know shit will happen. I expect it and I understand it. But that's not me. I can actually distance myself. It was really useful as a member of Parliament. People would come up to me and they would tell me about the most terrible things that were happening in their lives. They wanted to give me the emotion, and I'd look at them and I could empathise and say, ‘Yeah, I can understand that. Now Let's work out. What one thing would you like me to do about that? And the person would go, ‘well, I want you to fix it up’. Then I go, let's talk it through. Basically I wouldn't own other people's, problems, but I could help them work out that, I could, as a member of Parliament, I could do one thing, and I could do one thing well, but I can't solve your problem. You need to work that out. That ability to distance myself from emotion was really important.

The other thing I know about life is having a goal is really important. Things always go wrong, and you have a plan and it never works out for a whole lot of reasons. But if you're clear about what you want to do, you can go ‘Oh, well, that didn't work, that was tough. I've got to learn some lessons there’. Now I'll go back and have another go at that because my goal still exists. My life has been full of trying XYZ and it not working. And I go,’ Humm… Got a bit of learning to do there’. I go back to home, go and work in the veggie garden, go and chase the sheep, you know, do something different and say ‘OK, but I still want to work with the government on climate change’. And XYZ didn't work. Wonder what else I could do? Or, you know, I was in Parliament for six years and really tried hard to get the government to do stuff on climate. I couldn't move that other government. What we did is we came back to the community and I said to the community, ‘Well, government's not going to change, let's us do something’. And the community came together and did a whole lot of stuff, but only because I had the goal there. I could realise that the stuff in the middle was not the be all and end all. Maybe there's lots of ways of skinning a cat.

I think it's really important in your career, because sometimes you have got to say, this job's not working for me. I want a career that's fun, I want to be happy. I want my partner to be happy. I want to be working in a nice environment. This job is not working for me. I'll go and talk to somebody ─ because talking to people always helps. But if it's not going to work, if your goal is not being achieved, then you can pull back and say, ‘look, it's going to be a really hard thing. I got to stop doing this job. I'm going to try for another job that's going to help me get to my goal much more easily’.

But then again, you need the courage muscle because it's much, much easier to put up with the shit sometimes than actually call it out and try and get a better place. Meditation worked for me, talking to friends worked for me, having a clear goal worked for me. But absolutely understanding that shit, bad times and disaster is part of my life. And I'm going to finish on this Darren─really personally─the worst bits yet to come. The worst bit, and all the Buddhists will tell you this, getting ready for your death is the hardest bit of your living. So make sure you are ─ and I take it really seriously ─ I work hard to be fit to be mentally active ─ and know that when my time comes to get old and decrepit, I'm going to have to have enough money, I'm going to have to be in a good community, and I'm going to be surrounded by lots of young people so that they help me as I get ready to die. So that's a really deep answer to what wasn't probably such a superficial question, but I really wanted to give you the sense of it. It's not just about career. It's actually about how you live your life, knowing that shit happens.

Darren Peck:  
Thanks, Kay. It's a fantastic answer. Thank you so much.

Anne Walters:  
I love that too, Cathy. So basically, focus on the goal, not the process.

Cathy McGowan:  
Well, no, you need both. You need both. Because if the process is bad, it you don't get to your goal.

Anne Walters:  
That's fantastic. We have a question from Susie Perry on the chat.   
‘Cathy, thank you for speaking to us today. You've spoken about your great family support network who were key supporters or those who inspired you both men and women in agriculture’.

Cathy McGowan:  
It's too hard because there's zillions of them. And it was almost every single person I would come across, I would suck their inspiration. The truthful answer in the first place, my dad, he was a farmer and he had a consultancy business, I wanted to be like dad, as I said. He was really important as a role model and then when I got involved with Women in Ag, I met just all these amazing women farmers and every single one of them, I said, ‘But how do you do it?’. And they go well, you know…, ‘how do you feed your sheep or how do you do this?’ And she said, you know… ‘I can't lift up a sheep’. Well, here's how you do it, Cathy. So I go, ‘Oh, I didn't know that, thank you’ and then I'd send them a thank you letter ─ and I'm really good on thank you letters. Because I want to, let people know that when they tell me stuff I've understood it so I'd write a little note, but I also used to do it for marketing purposes as well. If I met a woman and she taught me something about farming that I didn't know, I go ‘Oh, thank you very much. I've applied it on my farm and it's working really well. kind regards Cathy McGowan’, and it would have my business card attached or something like that. I build my network that way, but I think you're asking the question at a much bigger level, so I'm going to move up a bit.

People like Joan Kirner. When I was in my thirties, I had a job in the Victorian AG department. Joan Kirner was the Minister for Conservation and Environment, Kay Setches was the Minister for Social Security and there was a couple of others, and they were ministers in the Victorian government, and they set up a thing called the Office of Rural Affairs. They understood that agriculture was directly connected to rural communities. I didn't know that. I always thought agriculture was separate.

That Office of Rural Affairs, and those ministers─and I ended up getting a job in the Victorian AG department working in that office ─ those women taught me how ─ and there were blokes there as well ─ the Minister for Agriculture, Evan Walker. Beth Woods, I see you're online, you will know some of these people, but Evan Walker, Mike Taylor, these guys in the ag department, they showed me how politics can be of service to the community. It was such an insight. I wanted to be like that. I wanted to be the sort of politician that was of service to people, and that politics was a vehicle for getting things done to make communities better. They showed me.

Then when I got to parliament, oh, I just loved it. People like Malcolm Turnbull, and I'm, you know, pitching at a high level, he wasn't prime minister, he was Minister for Communications at the time. We had very bad Internet in my electorate, and one of the things I absolutely needed to do was get more wireless telephone towers in these valleys. I got my courage muscle out, rang up the diary manager to see if I could make an appointment so see diary manager, to meet Malcolm Turnbull. Anyhow to talk about ─ and look, you've got no idea what courage this took. I was an independent from Victoria, not part of the Liberal Party, and I was the lowest of the low in the pecking order. Anyhow, I did it, and the diary secretary came back and said, ‘Yes, he's got quarter of an hour and such and such a date’. I went down to his office and I'm in a little tiny office and he's in a really big plush office, and I'm really scared that people will see me going into his office and the media will know, and it'll be terrible. I'm so, so scared.

Anyhow, getting in there, Malcolm says, ‘Would you like a cup of tea?’ And I go, ‘Yes. Yes please’. And this is his wife, Lucy I'm sure, but these beautiful Japanese ceramic teacups. And he has beautiful teapot. This is Malcolm Turnbull, and he offers me a cup of tea, and we sit down, and it was a bit like being in a country. You know, visiting someone in the country, we did the small talk. We did the work before we got to know each other. Before we got on to the work, and it was such an in such an important lesson to me to see the person first. Before you, you do the heavy stuff of the jobs.

Anyhow, I won't say we became friends ever, but we became colleagues and every single meeting we had, and sometimes we had to do some very tough negotiations as my confidence grew, we would always start with this cup of tea. I then picked it up as well and would have a teapot in my office. Just remembering to do the social work first before you did the political work was a really ─ get to know the person. If people didn't want to do it, well, that was okay. But mostly everybody would go ‘Oh, look, I'm in a real hurry, Cathy. I haven't got time for a cup of tea’. And I say, ‘That's okay. I only need five minutes. Cup of tea is two minutes. We can get the work done in three minutes, and then I'll be out, and they go ‘Oh, okay, well, a cup of tea’. But, you know, so that's sort of, he was such an inspiration to me about how he was such a gentleman in his politics. I learned a great deal from him about being effective in advocacy work.

Susie Perry:  
Excellent. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Anne Walters:  
Thanks Susie, thank you, Cathy.

I'm just having a look around. We've got a couple more minutes for any other questions. Does anyone else online have any questions? Nigel.

Nigel Young:  
Hi, Cathy. That was fantastic, thank you very much. You mentioned some of the courses that you've done like time management, leadership, public speaking, etc. How did you identify the skills that you thought you needed to develop in your career, and do you have any advice for young people starting off? Not that I'm claiming to be a young person, but it might be something handy I can pass on to my son. Thank you,

Cathy McGowan:  
Nigel, that is such a good question. Look, it's a really obvious thing to say, but people would tell me. I had to listen, but you would get the feedback. So, for example, you were doing… I'll just tell you about time management quickly. I can remember the time quite early in my I had my consultancy business going. I was living on my farm. I was incredibly busy. I just was working huge hours. There was just far too much I was trying to do, and one of my sisters rang up saying, ‘We're having a family barbecue on Saturday do you want to come?’ And I said, ‘Look, no, I'm too busy. I've got to get this stuff done for Monday’. I got told off in the biggest possible way, ‘What you don't care about, you're too busy. Who do you think you are? You're a bit ups’. Only your sisters can tell you off. And I thought, oh, that's terrible. I don't want to be too busy in my life that I haven't got time for the people I love. So that was the beginning of it. Then I was talking that through with some other women friends, and I said, ‘Well, how do you manage it?’. And they said, ‘go and do a time management course’. I said, ‘Oh, of course, I didn't know they existed’. Listening to the feedback you get because, I never would have done it, if I hadn't had that emotional shock from my family that I actually was out of control.

A similar course with facilitation. I can remember coming out of meetings that I had to run and being very dissatisfied with them. I would go up to people and I'd say, ‘how was that meeting?’. And people are usually very polite, but you could read their faces, like it was a real waste of time. And I said, ‘Oh, what would we have done? Anything, differently?’ Again, there'd be that deadly silence, and someone might proffer a little kind thing. And I realised that I wasn't doing a good job. Then I'd talk to friends and say, ‘Well, how do you run meetings or what do you do?’ And then someone would say, ‘Well, go and do a facilitation course, Cathy. Look, there's skills here. There's ways of doing this. You're not doing it. You are trying your best, but your best is not up to scratch. Helping people listen, and if in your role, Nigel, getting feedback on, rather than telling people they should do a course, is helping them set their goals. I wanted to be effective, and clearly, I wasn't. When it became pointed out to me, there was a gap and I could solve that gap by going and doing a course, it became easier. I have to say at that time in the Ag department in Victoria, or the Commonwealth government, in the nineteen nineties, a long time ago now, there was a huge number of courses available for people to go and do. I'm not quite sure if there's so many around now, but there were, adult education courses all over the place - the Ag department ran courses. I was a member of a group called APEN, Australasian Pacific Extension Network, I would go to their conferences and do their workshops. I would team up with other professional, extension networking people and ask them what courses they had done that were useful. The APEN conferences were particularly useful. I learned a lot from them.

Nigel Young:  
Excellent. Thank you very much.

Cathy McGowan:  
Well, I think we're done.

Anne Walters:  
Thank you. There's one more question in the chat that I thought I would read out to you. You might be able to answer very quickly. Before I do that, I might just ask, for anyone that's online, we are really keen to get your feedback, as Cathy has indicated through the presentation. It would be great to make this, network and these events what you want them to be. If you have got a couple of minutes to fill in the survey at the end of this, that would be great. I'm going to ask Shona just to pop the link for the survey in the chat so that before everyone logs off, you can grab that survey for us as well. Thank you, Shona, for doing that.

The question that Helen Spafford has put, Cathy to finish on is. Cathy you spoke about working with people to achieve shared goals. How have you handled situations where a group cannot seem to work together with a shared goal?

Cathy McGowan:  
Helen that's where I did a facilitation course. Facilitation courses teach you how to do that. There's a huge number of techniques, quite frankly, and the really good facilitators are excellent at it. I would encourage you to do it. There's a woman called, Viv McWaters, she's from Victoria. She does online facilitation courses, but I'm sure up in the Northern Territory there would be really good facilitators up there. I would encourage you, perhaps to maybe run one of these events, and just get some of those skills. There's a huge number of techniques you can use, then you find out of all the techniques which ones fit most comfortably with you, and then then practise them. You've got to practise to get to get better. I used to find opportunities to practise, so that was always fun as well. Find someone in the Northern Territory who's got a facilitation business and ask them if they would come and come to your workplace or maybe as part of the follow up here, Anne might get them to be able to come and do a workshop for you.

Anne Walters:  
Wonderful. Well, thank you, Cathy. We've hit 1.30 at my time. I just wanted to say from the bottom of my heart, thank you so much for coming. And being our first speaker on this network has been such an amazing and inspiring presentation from you. I'm sure everyone else has feels the same way we have.

Justine has put in the chat that ‘you've been inspired me with such wisdom. Thank you’. Which is a great way to finish. For those of you could fill out the survey, that would be fantastic.

Our next event is with Paul Burke, on Friday 25th of August, at the same time for those online. It would be great to see you again, but if you could give us feedback, that would be amazing. And once again, thank you, Cathy, for your time today.