**Lunch with Mike Guerin**

 **Facilitator: Rachel Chay**

Good morning, good afternoon and welcome to the NAPCAN monthly Virtual Leadership series.

We're very, very pleased to have you and very I'm very excited to be able to facilitate today's session.
We thank you for your time on this Friday afternoon and morning for some and hope everyone is coming to us well and ready for a weekend. Just a reminder that we will be recording this session and which has commenced. So that's just a heads up, if there's any concern to that, please get in touch via the chat.

So before we launch into the session proper with our guest Mike Guerin, I would like first to do an acknowledgement of country. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, on lands on which we are meeting. For me, I have the great pleasure today of being on Minjerribah, Stradbroke Island, which is the home of the Quandamooka People.
I acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this land and this region, I extend that recognition to the traditional custodians of all other lands on which other participants may be gathered today, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples attending today's session.

So the wonderful Anne Walters and I thank you to Anne for coordinating these events, a fantastic opportunity for us to come together and share experiences from leaders in the industry, and has perhaps unwisely asked me to have a short, give you a short spiel on my own leadership experience and journey and some of the challenges that I've faced along the way. I promise faithfully I will keep it short, because we're all much more interested in hearing from Mike, our guest speaker today.

So as far as leadership goes, for me it has been a lifelong journey. My parents would have you believe it started back in primary school even where I was first, again, perhaps unwisely, handed a microphone as school captain of McDowell State School here in Brisbane, and I think that's possibly - as tongue and cheek as it might sound- where the passion began. For what you can achieve as a leader, and that's not to create an empire for myself or to develop a kingdom, but more how through leadership you can be influential in your chosen area and how you can actually support and empower others around you.

My career has been predominantly in the animal health sector through again, a passion that began as a child of wanting to look after animals and their care. So through university vet school and into clinical practice, where again I love the work and I love the science, of course, but it became clear to me at that time again that where I really got my passion from, what got me out of bed in the morning, was the ability to lead and influence and along with help others.

So the first challenge of leadership, I think for me was identifying that leadership is a skill set in its own right. I mean, it's a very marketable skill set and how you go about crafting that as you go through your career and all that, the inevitables with twists and turns that we all face. So I've always challenged myself to continue educating myself and growing as a leader. Most people have an inherent ability to lead and or an inherent leadership style, but given my undergraduate days with my science background and need to educate myself that that sort of transformed itself into how I grew my skills, well I hope I grew my skills, as a leader.

The other one or, the other challenges I've had throughout my career through clinical practice and then in the private sector and now in the last five years moving into a government sector, is having the confidence and ability to lead in your own way.

So I suppose in some ways, without sounding a little bit, I don't know philosophical or navel gazing, about being authentic to yourself and discovering how best, how best you lead it. Of course, in my dynamic as a woman that has been having strong mentors, having a diversity of mentors, but also not falling trap to, again leading in a way that that others may and or that doesn't suit your style. So that really is probably the major challenges I faced along with the classic example of imposter syndrome which again, a part from a very select few I think we all come across, regardless if you're in a leadership role or not, and again how you work your way through - that is in my mind or what's worked for me is who you surround yourself with, having those mentors and most in my career they've always been informal mentors and how you are also have champions. So the people who have got your back when you're not in the room are really really critical or have been a critical part of my leadership journey.

So obviously, my most recent role in my current role is with the Queensland Government in the biosecurity space which has been I've been here nine months so I really truly have to stop saying I'm new here because people are going to stop believing that excuse. I think again what it's hammered home for me is as you build your leadership skill set it is applicable across a wide range.

I mean, obviously I have a again that science background and that understanding, but I've also learned very much that the critical role of leadership is also not to thank you are the smartest person in the room because when I look across my team at Biosecurity Queensland and of course the sector, the sector more broadly that couldn't be further from the truth. So I'll probably leave it there and I think I've, I'm sticking on time yes, I am perfectly.

So thank you for listening to that little intro to me. I'm always at the end of the phone, always happy to chat and talk people's ear off as Anne would probably be able to regale you with. So without further ado, I would love, I'm very grateful to have the opportunity to introduce Mike Guerin.

Mike has a senior executive with experience working with major corporations, running large farming operations, advancing agricultural research and increasing international trade. He grew up on a family farm in New Zealand ─ we won't hold that against you Mike ─ you've mostly lost their accent, so you know, thumbs up. Mike has held numerous senior executive roles in large corporations throughout his career, including regional and rural banking, managing director at ANZ which I'm sure that was a highly stressful position along with Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer at Elders and other huge role. Mike has been in the Chief Executive Officer role for with AgForce Queensland since October of 2017. So without further ado Mike over to you.

Michael Guerin
Thank you, Rachel, for the introduction and for you all for giving me a chance to come along and have a chat today, it's enormously appreciated and I've listened to a couple of others of these series on the way and it's a great minister to acknowledgement to Anne and others for putting it together and I hope I can add a little bit to the conversation today.

What I like to do is to talk to three things. Firstly, how I got to where I've got to in my journey and then more importantly to spend a bit of time talking about some of the lessons I've learned along the way and how that's influenced my leadership style. And I'm going to try and do that by giving five key moments in my leadership journey, which are most powerful to me.

And I think we all find that we learned from others everyday in our leadership grows as we learn and listen to others and the experiences that go around us. In my experience, some of the big ones I've had, the biggest influence on me, so I just want to touch on some of those by bringing some personal stories to it.

And then lastly, I've got a couple of wished I'd known statements I'd like to make. Unfortunately, you know, young bodies don't have wires heads on them. With the benefit of hindsight, if I could go back, things I wish I'd known.

So firstly, just by way of quick background, as Rachel said, I was brought up on a sheep and beef farm in New Zealand. I went to university at Otago, which is the bottom of New Zealand, and then I joined the ANZ Bank and frankly that was a decision in the absence of a better idea for a young graduate who wanted to earn some money and to spend it. I did want to go farming but succession wouldn't allow me to go farming in my family for reasons that aren't really relevant today, but it was with a sad heart I left the farm and went into the bank.

I spent twenty odd years with the bank. I want to touch on a couple of the salient moments in my leadership journey with the ANZ that have had an enormous influence on me since, and then left the ANZ back at the end of 2007. I spent some time with Elders and then, which I reflect on a little bit today as well, really just wanted to leave the corporate world behind I had had enough, I was burnt out and I actually went ─ and it’s only time I've got my hands dirty since I left the family farm ─ I actually went and managed a dairy farm in Tasmania. Which is far enough away from the real world to, you know, to be hidden from it and spent some time there reinvesting in myself I guess. Came out of that, did a couple of roles, including three years with the state government in South Australia ─ which is my only experience in the public service ─ but really informative as I look to lead and influence government. Then six years ago I was lucky enough to get the chance to lead AgForce where I remain today. So that's my quick journey.

Couple of reflections about that journey in my career. The first is, I use the analogy of fitness training. And I'm not that fit, but I try and keep an element of health by jogging and doing other things and when I take on things like half marathons, I find I can train for weeks and get nowhere. And then all of a sudden, one day I'll go for run and I'll be a lot faster than I've been before. And I think leadership and careers are about the same things. You're building experiences every day of the week and every now and then you realise the benefit of those as you take either a career leap or and insight leap or you find you are better at something. Actually, you've been building towards that for a number of years, although you might not know that.

Secondly, never turn aside an opportunity. Rachel touched on it earlier when introducing me, but I had the great privileges before I was forty years old, have been the Managing director of ANZ Regional and rural banking operations with over three thousand staff sitting below me. Rachel touched on imposter syndrome, let me tell you younger than forty with three thousand bankers below you, there's a really humbling moment. I got that opportunity through some support from senior people in the bank at the time, through some incredible coaching from a mentor and I was very tempted to turn it aside and with the benefit of hindsight, was one of those moments in my career I am so glad I didn't turn it aside for the learning and growth I got from it.

Now you need to respect mentors, which I guess I've touched on and the other thing is to reflect on or for me, it's reflecting on those who had the most influence on you and I want to come back to that and tell a story about my mother as one of the experiences as inform me about my leadership journey.

So that's my journey and within that I'm going to pick out five moments where I had a huge learning around leadership and how then I've applied it and has given value to me.

First one is my career in ANZ, I came through the ranks reasonably quickly and it was a great journey and was a great privilege to be a part of. What underpin the early part of that journey was my ability in sales, I've always and still love selling. I think it's an honorable sport and it is a sport and it's about providing value to the customer, but also beating the opposition.

So in the bank, it was all about beating all the other banks to a sale. I produced some very good numbers. I won a whole lot of awards early on and ANZ for the numbers I was producing and I rapidly got a team underneath me of salespeople, so I was doing this selling and more running a team. But this as when the first great leadership lesson came for me in the organization and it's a great credit to the ANZ they did this.

I got set down one day by a senior person in the bank and they said to me, ‘Michael the numbers you produced, the sales you do are fantastic, but we are probably going to have to let you go’, in other words fire you. And the reason for that is that as you build a team underneath you, you are burning good people, you're running over staff, you're not spending time investing in them. And they gave me some practical examples.

It was a really seminal moment for me because, what I thought I was doing was inviting people into the team, and coming to understand weather sales was for them or not, and if it wasn't for them moving them on quickly. And I thought that was the best thing I could do for them, because if you're not suited for sales, the sooner you're out, the better.

However, I was doing none of the things I now try, and do really well, around leadership and investing in people, proper performance management processes, thinking about at the start of this, it’s your fault as their line manager, not theirs. So a different perspective and going into performance conversation.

But the bank, to their credit, said ‘we'll give you one chance to rectify your ways and will give you a coach to help you through that, but if things don't change quickly, you're gone because we're sick of losing good people. And by the way, the better salespeople in your teams are leaving too, because they don't like the leadership style you're bringing’.

And the interesting thing about a wise head on young shoulders was I had no visibility of that at all. I didn't realise it was burning people off. I didn't realise I was upsetting good salespeople. I just thought I was giving people the news they needed quickly so they could move on to their career and things that suited them better. So it was in a moment where, you know, if you have a little bit of humility and self reflection and someone was kind enough to give you that feedback in a good way, you have a chance to respond, which is an important thing to do as a leader.

So I went to see the coach and the coach works in an organisation which is a global organisation and does a lot of consulting and research and also has a human resources arm and they've done a lot of research over the years about performance management. They showed me a structure which is still used today and I want to share with you and it solved my issue in terms of building teams around me or was one of the big building blocks to do so and that is to say that if someone who is not performing it comes down to one of two things, it's either will or skilled. They are the two foundational pieces, which means somebody's not working - the reasons why someone's not working in a role.

If it's around skill, it's your fault as their line manager, so you might have put them in a job that's not suited, you might not have given the training, your weekly coaching might be inadequate, there's a whole number of reasons for it. But if the reason they're not performing is skil, the faults yours, full stop, black and white. If it's will, they're not in the right role and the best thing you can do is move them on to something that suits them better.

So the first thing you need to do as leader is to work out whether the person's non-performance is because of will and skill. In the research, the global research over 98% of people who aren't performing aren't performing because of elements of skill. In other words, it's the line managers fault, not the individuals fault, and that's a really interesting insight for all of us as leaders for 98% of the people that don't work under your teams, it's actually your fault because it's a skill issue, not their fault as a will issue. So that's a powerful framework as you start to think about it or it is in my view anyway.

So the first thing you need to do, and I now do, is spend the time to be confident about where the issues will or skill and that's a really hard one to fundamentally understand. I always seek guidance. In the case of AgForce, from the AgForce Board, given I am the CEO, and from others and have conversations and give me confidence to make that decision. And then once I've made that decision, you act accordingly. And for most, it's a skill issue, so it's you that need to upgrade your support for that person in a number of ways and if it is will then you need to move them on in a way that's respectful of them and gives them the chance to reset.

I applied that in the ANZ and I went from a team with a high turnover to a team with very little turnover almost overnight. The good people responded a lot more strongly in the change to me was enormous and I've held it ever since. So that's the first little lesson about leadership I suppose that I had early on. I had the privilege of the organisation given me the chance to fix my ways. So in other words, I decided that my issue was skill, not will, so therefore it was there problem to solve and they put that coach and support around me and consequences if I didn't take that up. So a very powerful moment for me, and as leaders, you know that the more we get into leadership roles, the more what those that work to us do, make the difference. So if I put another way, the less we do in the more time we invest in those around us, the better the outcomes will be. So not about doing, we're about investing in others and that foundational piece is really, really important.

Second lesson, or the second seminal moment, I suppose for me, was again in the ANZ Bank and using a frame which I've now heard used elsewhere, which some of you might have heard about - no triangles. So when you have a concern or an issue with somebody weather this is professionally or personally, and as human beings, we seem to be hardwired to talking about that issue or that person with somebody else. Someone we trust over a beer on a Friday night, around the coffee machine at work, and every time you do that, you take value away from the conversation you should be having with the person you have the concern with. In other words, you're avoiding tough conversations, you're avoiding a really foundational part of leadership.

Or to flip it another way, how do we feel knowing that people are having conversations about us where we have a counterpoint, but we don't have the chance to provide it because the conversations being had absent us. So the frame for me for that one has become, whenever I have a concern with anybody personally or professionally, I owe to them, and I owe to me as a leader, that the first conversation I have is with the person I have the concerns or issues with. There's a lot of training about how you go about that conversation in a respectful way. You talk about your feelings, there's a number of ways into it. But every time you have that conversation first with the person, you get a better outcome. Every time you first have that conversation with the third party, you take value out of what you could be providing to that individual.

And I'm not perfect at it, and I don't think human beings are wired to be perfect at it, but it's a great thing to have in your mind all the time, because every time you create a triangle, you recognize you've created a triangle and you back out from that triangle. So you have less triangles and more direct conversations. My experience again around leadership and lessons learnt is the more of those conversations you have, the more you invest in other people, the stronger the outcomes over time and the more you contribute from the from the pace you come from.

The third one and then I'll change tack a wee bit, it's a little bit again about those conversations and professional respect and it's an example where I'm going name an individual and it's an example from Agforce. And in fact, I've got two AgForce examples today from the last few years.

The first one was when, I don't have a back or sorry before I joined AgForce, I didn't have any background in advocacy. My background is commercial as we described briefly at the start, so advocacy was a new thing for me. As I joined AG force in late 2017, we were coming to the end of a three year conversation with government which hadn't gone well for us around vegetation management, and the government was heading towards a new set of vegetation regulations and Queensland, which industry and communities were opposed to, and where, despite all of the good work of AgForce for two or three years, we had had no influence on the final form of what was proposed with those regulations.

We should never get here as advocates, but we've got to the point where the regulation was going through the Parliament, we had had none of the changes we wanted and our collective membership decided we wanted to express our disappointment as strong as we could so there was a bunch of protests going on. So I joined an organisation with no experience in advocacy, no deep knowledge of the background, and my role was to stand on the back of the ute with a loud megaphone and express very clearly the views of the membership to the government, and that was paid to do so that's what I did. But I remember standing on the back of the ute, saying there has got to be a better way. You know this brutal protesting and yelling at each other may feel good on the day, but it creates no value over time and doesn't result in better laws or regulations and in fact, pushes people into corners.

And the reason I'll mention that was there was a great example that morning of leadership, which has always stuck with me in my advocacy journey. That came from the minister at the time, Minister Lynam. Minister Lynam was the minister in charge of those regulations and taking them to the Parliament that morning. On the morning of the protest outside of Parliament in Queensland, which is when the regs were going through the House, we met all of the members and Grant Morsley, who has a general President, myself at the time at about 6:00am for a sausage sizzle and then we waited till about nine o'clock to make as much noise as we could in the protest. As we were meeting at 6:00am, Grant Morsley and I got a text from Minister Linen saying, ‘can I buy you a coffee? I'm down in the Parliament’. So Grant and I went into the Parliament, we didn't tell anyone that was gathered for breakfast we were heading, but we went in to have that coffee. Minister Lynam said to us, he said, ‘I know what you're going to do today. You're going to stand up and say some reasonably blunt things about me. And I want to say two things to you. Firstly, I'll be in the Parliament saying blunt things about you, but secondly, I know that today you are paid to do a job and I'm paid to do a job, but tomorrow we need to work together for the benefit of this industry, the benefit for communities across Queensland and the broader benefit, so I just wanted to have a coffee and acknowledged today, acknowledge your leadership and look forward to the ongoing conversations we need to have once today's past us.”

That to me was an incredible moment of leadership by Minister Lynham, that was a classic case of avoiding the triangle, then we went on to do what we did that day. The laws were enacted but we remained the relationship and we're back working with Minister Lynham the week after.

So that was an incredible moment to me and has stuck with me ever since. So it doesn't matter how hard the conversation is, as a professional, you were paid to represent who you paid to represent, and you need to have whatever conversation you need to have, so you're as effective as you can be every day, and sometimes they're incredibly tough conversations. Sometimes they are conversations you don't want to have, but as leaders, it's important that we have them, that we don't avoid them.

I to this day, I have a great respect for Anthony Lynham's, now called then Minister Lynam, for the way he showed leadership on that day to Grant and I. For the crowds gathered outside in the protest, nobody's been never the wiser for the coffee we had that morning but if I was ever to acknowledge to the wider audience, I'd say to them the changes we got post that coffee have benefited all of them. So it was a coffee worthwhile having and an example of leadership, and it didn't take away from what we had to do that day, but it set the scene going forward.

I just want to change tack a bit and talk about the role of leadership and the respect of all people as individuals and not making assumptions and again, use an example to do that.

After I had the role for Regional Rural Banking at ANZ, my last roll at ANZ was as the Managing Director of the Pacific. ANZ at the time had operations in twelve Pacific countries and was a wonderful role, an enormous diversity of cultures of countries of challenges but ANZ at the time had about a 40% market share across the broader Pacific and a lot of those little islands had a big reliance on ANZ for central bank functions for solvency and country, et cetera, et cetera.

So I took that on with all the richness that comes from it in terms of that cultural diversity, in terms of supporting those countries growth and representing ANZ in doing so. Early on, ANZ was starting to centralise its back office functions back in those days and it's, you know, there's been a lot of centralization gone on since, but there was a move to centralise all of the Pacific islands back office functions into Australia. I felt that that wouldn't be a good thing in terms of respecting those countries and investing in those countries if we're taking a lot of the work from those countries and centralising into Australia. So we came up with this bright idea that we that we had to centralised, that we might do that firstly in Fiji and then think about IT and other things to enable that through other countries but started in Fiji. People on this call may not know, but Fiji is a heavily unionised country around culture, family is important that comes very much first. A lot of people, you know, the hours of work are during the day, the evenings are for families, a lot of aspects of Fiji that we may not understand. I certainly didn't understand as a Kiwi living in Australia. To run a centralised system and Fiji we needed to run a twenty-four hour backoffice function with all the challenges that comes with that, given the culture of Fiji and the lack of those backoffices or twenty-four hour operations. As we're going through those conversations with all of the formal channels, there was a thing called the Diwali festival that happened in Fiji and it happens once a year. That's where the Fijian Indian community celebrate a lot of things and the ANZ put on a key function where the Prime Minister of Fiji was turning up and there was three hundred odd other guests, and I was there in my role and I got there and there are a whole lot of wonderful Fijians serving the food and the wine as a beautiful evening, the Prime Minister spoke. It was a really great celebration and I really enjoyed the evening. Then we were there for two weeks after that trying and talk to unions and other community groups to see if we could set up this back office function. Towards the end of the evening I noticed that a lot of the people that have been serving the wine and the food were sitting around the kava bowl down the back. Carva is a drink that, over and Fiji they're like sitting around the bowl and drinking and talking – it’s a big community thing. As the guests were leaving and I was running out of people to talk to, I went down the back and sat down around the kava bowl. I learned a lot of things that night. I learnt that the people there serving the food and the drinks were ANZ staff who worked in the mailroom, did the telling functions, etcetera, etcetera and had been asked to come along, were proud to come along and serve, drink, etcetera that might because the Prime Minister was there and a few other people were there.

I also learnt that in Fiji culture, your boss at work as someone that you have some respect for, but the person you look to for leadership is the tribal chief. The tribal chief in Suva worked in the mail room at ANZ and was sitting around the kava bowl while having just served food and drinks to all of us. If I hadn't sat around that kava bowl, I wouldn't have known all of that.

So we then spent three hours, the sun was coming out when we finished drinking kava ─ which if you have ever drunk, it's an acquired taste ─ and talking about what ANZ wanted to bring to Fiji and the village chief, talking to us about what was important to his village and his people if we did it. We had a weeks-worth of work solved by the time the sun came up ─ I was awfully tired ─ but I'd solved a week worth of work. My reflection as a leader on that example is, if I hadn't taken the chance to go down and sit down with some people and thank them, around the kava bowl, with respect to their own culture, I would have had none of that conversation. We may not have got anywhere in the western way of the week that followed, with formal meetings and board tables, and we may not have got a back office in Fiji and I'm proud to say that back office remains in place, does all of the Pacific work, and it holds jobs through about three hundred Fijians which would otherwise have been based in Australia. I reflect on that all of the time because that was by chance, it wasn't a deliberate strategy to go down and sit down the back and drink kava, in fact, I probably would have been better to go home and go to bed given I was tired, but I just chose to spend five minutes and go and thank people.

So for all of us as leaders, it's amazing what a five minute ‘Thank you’, not a hard thing to do, where it can lead you, and even if it leads you know where, it's a, it's a powerful thing to do. That's always set with me as a really powerful moment around leadership.

The last one I want to touch on is back at AgForce again and then I'll want to round it up with a bit of ‘wished I'd known’ and a couple of other reflections, and then hand it back over to Rachel.

And that, is for those of us in Queensland, they'll know this as soon as I raise it. About two and a half years ago, the Queensland Government put together a lower emissions pathway committee to think about the journey for Queensland and lowering emissions as part of this broader conversation that the global community is having around that climate and landscapes and all of things that are critical to us, this human beings.

I went along to represent AgForce in the industry to the first of those meetings, about two and a half years ago. The meeting was all about targets, regulation and things that we need to put in place now to deal with this, this urgent issue for Queensland to take a leadership role. It was with good intent that this was all being put forward, but the really interesting thing about the several meetings that followed that first meeting, was if the government had landed on this idea of targets and regulations and taxes for example, the emissions tax in New Zealand, it would have been very hard for industry to come along that journey without being a co-design contributor, if you like.

The conversation in that room for about nine months changed completely from one around targets and regulation and taxes, to one of co-design, of innovation, of technology and of working together in a way that will actually lower emissions faster than regulation, faster than taxes and other things and in a way that we can stand beside government and show leadership on. It ended up with our General President, or chair of AgForce, Georgie, standing beside the Minister for Agriculture and Queensland proudly launching a lower emissions pathway document a number of months ago now.

If I reflect back to where the conversation was two and a half years ago and where it ended up, it fundamentally changed. The lesson for me again, a bit like a couple of other examples I've shown as the power of conversation. The power of tough conversation. The value of being involved and at the table, even if you feel like you'd rather not be and all that sits around that in a leadership sense.

So those five examples are all around people. Some of the examples around seminal moments to me with people that work to me and leadership internally, and some of those examples are around the broader community and the value of leadership in that broader community.

If I reflect on my leadership journey and the privilege, I have now working for AgForce, those similar moments have made an enormous difference to my approach.

If the ANZ Bank hadn't set me down and said you're rough, you know, brutal etcetera, etcetera early on, then I may never have picked that up and I may still be good salesperson, but I would have damaged the thousands of people along the way. But for them, showing leadership and sitting me down and perhaps my own reflection of accepting that and showing better humility, I think I'm much better at what I do and I hope that those around me get more benefit from me than they would have otherwise.

That same piece goes for all of the examples I've given today where those amazing moments where people invested in me or situations invested in me, have meant that I think I can do a better job in AgForce and I think about my application for the AgForce role, I never dreamed I'd been an advocacy group, but I am and I'm proud of it and I remember at the interview using some of those examples to describe while why didn't understand advocacy, I learned a little bit about leadership and I could bring a commercial perspective to the organization which they wanted. I could also bring those leadership lessons and journeys along because those of us who are in advocacy would know, it can be a tough space but fundamental to that is the ability to have conversations. So that has had a huge effect on my career and I think I'm very privileged to have been given those lessons by different people and that has meant that I have had a much richer journey and I hope those around me have as well because of it.

Then I guess turning over to ‘what I wished I'd known’, but also, perhaps starting with listening to others.

I had, as I guess a lot of sons do, I had an incredibly close relationship with my mother. She was an amazing person and today's not about my mother, except to say that I there was nothing that mum and I wouldn't talk about. She was an incredible leader and person in so many ways. We lost my mum back in 1999 and we had a few months notice that it was coming so some really powerful moments that I had with my mother. I remember lying on the bed beside her and, what was if it wasn't going to be the last conversation that's close to the last conversation. Mum saying a few things to me that she'd said to me before, but when she had said them to me previously, I hadn't actually let it sink in. I was just nodding and smiling rather than listening intently. But I listened that day because I knew I was about to lose somebody that had given me so much. What she said to me has sat with me ever since firstly. Secondly, what sat with me from that conversation was, never nod and smile and not listen. If you're not prepared to listen don’t enter the conversation. Be good enough and show enough leadership, to say to the counter party ‘I’m a bit tired’ or ‘I can't be bothered’ or ‘can we come back to it’ or respectfully decline the conversation but don't sit there and listen and disrespect the other person in that way for one. Secondly, you know you get the value of those conversations that you may not see at the time, but you'll see later. I use the mum example because it was an amazing moment as we could imagine for losing someone that special to us. The lesson to me was, and Mum said this to me, she goes ‘I've told you many times, you have never listened to me, so I'll give it one more go.’ And she was so right. She was so on the money. She knew me well, and that's set with me and ever since.

Just to finish on a couple of ‘wished I had known comments’ and then hand back to Rachel. The first one and I'd like to actually acknowledge Paul, who was the speaker on an earlier one of these who said this, but it resonated very well with me when I listened to the series and it's something that I wish I'd known a lot earlier and it also touches on the way I'm in the staff and the early days etcetera.

And that was the value of relationship building in peacetime. So again, it's Paul's words, not mine but I just want to reflect them today I guess, in a different context. Paul talked a lot about the value of building relationship in peacetime because when something blows up and you need those relationships, that is no time to be building them. If you are seeking support from others, you are borrowing from them, rather than taking from an invested relationship. As I think about, for example, the Minister Lynham example. The value of relationship building with Minister Lynham ─ and not by me, because I just joined AgForce, but by the broader AgForce family ─meant that in that moment we got the chance to have a coffee with Minister Lynham and we could start the conversation the next day. The value of relationships and the value of building them in peacetime, when you've got the time to do it, you will never not get value from building a relationship in peacetime. There's no person that there is no value in building a relationship with, and that is in your personal life as well as your professional life in my humble opinion.

The last one that I want to pass on in the ‘wished I had known’ is to grab every opportunity. Never to have the impostor syndrome - grab it. If someone offers you an opportunity to grab it. Once you've grabbed it, if you've got that ‘oh my god moment’, then seek the support you need. Seek the structure around you that you need, but do not not grab it. Do not ever hesitate - grab it, because someone's offering it to you for a reason. They've seen something in new that you might not see. I haven't met anyone that's given me an opportunity that's done it to watch me fail. Everybody who has offered me an opportunity has offered it to me because they see value in doing so. In the way I've struggled through some big opportunities which I didn't know how to start with, it was about getting a mentor or getting a coach, getting some structure around me. So grab every opportunity. Imposter syndrome is real, but don't use that as a reason to walk away. Use that as a reason to double down and thinking about the support that you put around you.

Just to finally finish on that one. One of the most important structures to put around you is the personal structure, would that be family or otherwise needed to support you in going and having a go at what you're doing.

When I, for example took on the Managing Director of the Pacific role with ANZ, it meant I was away from home about three weeks and four. Not away from home as in down the road and back this evening or one night away, as in overseas, away for a week or two. My children were reasonably young. The biggest conversation I had at the time was with my wife about whether we can run a family and be good parents and me do the Pacific role. That was an incredibly important conversation. Again, the value of relationships in peacetime, the value of sitting down with someone who's support you will need and asking for that support when you've got the call light of the weekend to reflect on and think about it, come back to it, rather than waiting for the last minute or being in the or taking on the role and then saying by the way, I need to be away I'm hoping you're alright with that. The value of that relationship-building in peacetime goes much broader than professionally it also sits personally.

So I'll pull up there, I hope that's been of value. As I’ve said, I've really appreciated the chance and it's been good to listen to others as well ─ Rachel, back to you.

Rachel Chay
Thanks Mike, I have pages and pages of notes, so thank you so much, what a really amazing walk through your journey. I have had a lot of opera esque ‘a-ha’ moments from listening to you speak and probably the biggest one for me is around that concept of purposeful reflection. Rather than when these events come up and you start thinking, I've got to say something ─ which you have not Mike ─ but certainly that's more my style is how do you actually take some time out to have that purposeful reflection.

I really loved the way you phrased the will versus skill. It's certainly the way I've always operated, but just not in such a snappy way. I will most definitely be stealing that and using that with my team. We're still a new team where I am and just using that lens is incredibly helpful and to your point, incredibly powerful.

I also really appreciate you sharing I'm what for you I'm sure are quite personal stories, Mike.
I think again that shows a lot of courage in your own leadership, particularly around your lovely mum and the influence she's had. I certainly hope to have that sort of influence in relationship with my own children as they get into the teenage and young adult years so thank you I really appreciate that sort of step into some more personal stories there.

We've got about ten minutes left, the floor is open for questions I had one to just get the ball rolling, if that's okay Mike and Anne, if I could leap in there first.

Mike with your example with Minister Lynham, you were saying that at that time and it probably spoke more to the relationships that government had with other stakeholders at the time ─ AgForce’s approach was to be there with the loudspeaker and try─which some organizations still do today─ try and have that sort of approach to advocacy and you were saying that you had your moment of thinking that that was not the right approach. How did you change what may have been a long embedded behaviour or approach or culture or of AgForce into hey guys, get it, this is how we're going to do this smarter with more influence.

Michael Guerin
That’s a really good question, Rachel and it's a journey the broader organization has been on and the first thing I'd say in response is when we have those moments, don't lose the learning that comes from them. Why did we get there? What could we do better next time? Those reflections are really, really important. Can I say that, hopefully never again and my time but, there are moments when those things are needed. It's not, ‘we don't do that’, but it is a lot about leadership and influence in getting outcomes for those we serve. AgForce has got a three letter word purpose statement and that's the only reason we exist and we refer back to that all the time and that's about producers.

So, if standing on the back of the ute, the best thing we can do on the day, then so be it. But the reflection we had on the back of that was a lot of things we could have done that may have avoided that. And by getting there, we had no influence on outcomes, we had a government and an industry a little bit offside for a while and needing to rebuild bridges, because not all of government was warm to us in the weeks that followed, as Minister Lanham was, and vica versa.

You need to have an organization with purpose, you need to be clear about your objectives and ours are to influence government policy settings to allow agriculture to thrive, to allow better environmental outcomes, stronger biodiversity. When you're reflect on those things, Rachel, they're the same goals government has. this is the odd thing about this. We come from a different perspective with the same goal, ninety nine per cent of the time because we're part of the same community.

The importance of reflection and not avoiding another one of those if we have to, but making sure we've done everything we can to get good outcomes before we even contemplate that and hopefully we never get back there. If we do, we've done everything I guess to avoid it and protest is a thing we use in democracy, but it's not one of our reflections Rachel is, it feels good on the day, provides no outcomes, the only outcomes are lifting membership Rachel, but we're not there for growing membership per se we are there for member value.

I didn't bring this along for this reason, I was going to use it earlier, but I didn't. Can I reflect just finally answering that question on a statement that the staff of AgForce and the electids ─ the members and senior roles ─ have put together just in the last few months which reflect on the internal values and tries to bring some of that stuff to life, which has been a six year journey since that day of protesting. So let me read it to. These are words deliberately chosen built over a long period of time, which will now turn up on their website.

‘Ag forces is a place where cooperation, compassion, hard work and high standards can create life changing events for many people. We are a large collective of food and fibre producers with shared needs, a thirst for improvement and a rich pool of energy, skills, talent and passion. We advance sustainable Agri business and bring resources together in ways that are affirming and effective to create significant change.’

And when you reflect on those words standing on the back of a ute, has very little to do with any of that but that has everything to do with the hard work, the tough conversations, the energy and the focus of the organization to try and avoid that but to get better outcomes.

Rachel Chay
Fantastic, thanks Mike. Again, it's just really nice to dig into that quite specific topic and I couldn't agree more that it's not a about putting aside ways of achieving outcomes, but to your point, doing it in a way that has yet that has your everybody's eyes focused on what is the outcome you're trying to achieve. So what is it in the toolkit that's going to get you there? That's fantastic, thank you so much.

The other little comment I had, which again was a take away from your presentation was around those personal structures around you in leadership and acknowledging the role of family or whatever your chosen support structure is, and also the sacrifices they make, most of us who have been on a leadership journey are supported and held up by our families. And I think sometimes some leaders fail to acknowledge that the support structures role and or what they may sacrifice to allow you to pursue those leadership opportunities, that was again a really powerful message for me, thank you, Mike.

Anne, I don't know if people were putting are put in questions in the chat or if anyone had any questions.

Anne Walters
Rachel, Rosa and Zarmeen both have their hands up.

Rachel Chay
Oh, fantastic, sorry I can't see them, well, I I don't know who was first, I'll throw the Rosa.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)
Wonderful. Thank you and thanks so much, Mike.

Sharing a bit of a, not a conundrum, but a really appreciate your advice, particularly around the will versus skill. What happens if you've─I'm thinking about skill now─you've got a team member who has had every opportunity to have training, mentoring and coaching, and despite all of that, are still not working at that level ou would expect and not have that skill set that you'd expect for a particular role. What do you do?

Michael Guerin
Rosa, I like the simplicity of the model, and so the model says if you've done everything you can to address the skill issue, then it's a will issue and it's really as black and white as that. The nuance and the model which has been powerful to me, is that you need to be very careful in your decision making to make sure you're confident with that decision. Make the decision, but give yourself the time. The first part is, as I touched on earlier, is it will or is it skill? That's a really important decision to make. The modelling says ninety eight per cent of it is skill. So therefore it's your fault, not theirs, or your opportunity should say rather than theirs. And Rose, I'd give you the same reflection on this.

If you've done everything you think you can, then take the moment to double check that you've done everything you think you can, check with your line manager or someone that you know around you, when you were confident that it's will, then the best thing to do is to release that person for their next opportunity. Take the time to be confident in your decision, and then the model says act, and the sooner you act the better.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)
Wonderful, thanks for that.

Michael Guerin
Thank you.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)
Much appreciated.

Rachel Chay
Thanks, Rosa. We've certainly all got those challenges in that. But I do again like you, Mike, I like the simplicity of this, this is the gate. This is the first gate to go through is around that will versus skill and then where you put all the effort in and it becomes about, will then of course we're generally all got performance management frameworks and other and other mechanisms by which we would have to work through that one which no one ever loves of course.

Anne was it Sabine, did you say had the other question, I can't say on my screen, I apologise.

Anne Walters
Zarmeen.

Zarmeen Hassan
I'm off mute, so yes, thank you.

Rachel Chay
Fantastic

Zarmeen Hassan
Thanks. Hi Mike and thank you, I'm Zarmeen and I work with AUSVEG and I'm also part of the diversity in agricultural leadership program cohort this year, which I know that you're a mentor on, and it's an amazing program. And when you say, you know, one should have mentors it helps you stop and reflect and put your mind in a bit of a tizzy as well, but I think that's great, It good to get lost and then find yourself again.

Also you know in biosecurity we keep talking about building relationships in peace time, which is absolutely critical because when you know, when things come, it's really it's a stressful time for both government and industry and those relationships are so critical but that's not my question.

I want to come back to your ANZ experience and you talked about the fact that senior leadership actually came back and gave you that feedback and sort of directed you towards, you know, probably who you are today and some reflective changes.

I want to ask you about feedback coming from your troops. You know people that you're leading, they are an incredibly important part of your career as well and in reflecting on your career, have you had some really strong and harsh feedback from your team which has helped you change your trajectory or the way that you managed or leave them as well and how you took that on board?

Michael Guerin
Yeah, quick answer Zameen, is I’ve had some very direct feedback from those that work to me over the years. And again, when I was younger, with the younger head on my shoulders, I may have chose to put some of that aside or believe there's no value in it.

The biggest reflection I have nowadays is there's no such thing as bad feedback. It is a person's perspective and if it's given in the spirit of honesty and in a professional way, then it should be accepted as valid feedback because it is the view of the counterparty and they see you in a way that you can't see yourself even if you look hard in the mirror. So as I've got older, I've appreciated the harder feedback more and I still get it, and I think we all get it and we should welcome it.

I find in my current role, we went as we all did, we went through the COVID journey. We went from a little office where everybody was essentially in the one place, we could solve issues around the coffee machine. We could see in the morning if someone's shoulders were hung a bit low and, you know, wrap our arms around them and have a chat to them ─ not physically ─ but you know, see how they are. We've lost all of that and the rebuild and the culture of AgForce has been a tough and is an ongoing journey. Zarmeen, I've had some of my harshest feedback, if I can put it away, from those that work for me in the last three years in Ag force since COVID came, we all disappeared. The workload of AgForce like a lot of places we're very busy people, you probably wouldn't work for AG force if you didn't believe in the journey and the industry. When any of our six and a half thousand Members say we just need to do this now, we try and do it and sometimes that creates a lot of pressure. When we are all in the same office, we could see where that pressure point was and going to help that person much more quickly. When you're working remotely, you can't necessarily see it, so some of the my some of the harshest feedback I've received as recently about the lack of support they feel from me over the last few years. I think that's because I'm still doing the best, but it's hard in the virtual world. They think I've given up and gone home, that's not quite the words, but they think I've slowed up on it. But from their perspective, that's their reality of me. So that's their version of me, so I need to respect that for what it is. It's a professional conversation that they are wanting to have with me. It's their view of me, so therefore it's relevant and real for me and I should accept that and use that and thinking about doing things differently from my perspective.

Zarmeen Hassan
Thanks Mike. That's been great. Thank you.

Rachel Chay
Thank you Zarmeen that was a fantastic question as well.

Anne is there any others? We've probably got time for one more.

Anne Walters
There isn't, but I do have one if that's alright.

Rachel Chay
Oh, fantastic.

Anne Walters
Fantastic. Thanks, Mike, that was fantastic. I really, really enjoyed it and I really echo Rachel’s views around, you know, that personal element that you brought to it, which was so fantastic. During your presentation you just mentioned about Imposter syndrome, and that's something that certainly comes up a lot in the spaces that I work in and I just wondered if you might comment on how you've managed to overcome imposter syndrome yourself given you know you actually mentioned that you felt that it was something real.

Michael Guerin
Yeah, Anne, early on when, for me, imposter syndrome was a bigger thing, because I was younger and less experienced and getting pulled into rolls without the experience you really needed for those roles, what looked after me was always prioritising coaching and mentoring. Providing it to others and accepting it for yourself and in reflection I should have done more of that. When I got my big opportunities and my professional career like the ANZ jobs we talked about earlier, I took them on with some of my confidence coming from those that I sought advice from like my coach and my mentor. I at any one stage, and I do that more religiously these days than I used to, I'm always mentoring at least two people and I always have a mentor. Someone who I don't know who I see out in the community doing something that I could learn from, and I ring them cold normally cause I get another connection out of it and I get a perspective I hadn't thought about before.

So it's a really important part of what we do, but that was the biggest thing for me Anne, early on, particularly with those ANZ rolls was having people like a go to. So rather than saying ‘ohh no way too big, too scary, I'll stay where I am’, I could ring a mentor and say that looks too big and scary, I think I should stay where I am, what do you think? And if I am to take it on, what should I do to make sure that I can deliver? I can do the role and I can add value to those around me and meet the KPI's off the role and without those conversations, I think it would have failed. And without those conversations, I probably wouldn't have taken some of those roles on.

And what do you find is sometimes you have supporters and mentors and coaches around you that you actually don't realise are there. People who believe in you and are wanting to help you along but not wanting to be too conscious about it. And that's an interesting reflection for me because in a couple of those instances, in hindsight, I had people, when I say looking after me, people providing some gentle coaching and support in a way that I didn't realize what they were doing at the time, so don't ever underestimate the support you have around you.

If someone offers you a role or an opportunity, respect the fact that that offer has being made with due consideration to where you are and the skills you bring. So don't you know, respect it by accepting the role. Don't disrespect by putting the role aside, seek to talk to those that can help you give that confidence. Build that support structure around you. We talked earlier about family. Those things are really important Anne, that helped me through those early days. These days I don't really have too much impostor syndrome, I'm old enough, just have a crack and if it all fails, so be it.

But the value of mentors, the value of coaches, the value of the support around you, respecting the fact that people want you to take on the role are really important things that have helped me along. Thank you.

Anne Walters
Awesome. Thanks so much, Mike.

Rachel Chay
Thanks, Anne. Great question and I love it. I love that concept, again I've never reflected on the fact that where people are giving an opportunity, they're not doing it out of the goodness of their heart, they believe in your ability to do the role based on the skills you bring and that's really quite powerful statement Mike, thank you.

So I'm going to try and be a good facilitator where at 2:01, so I've dropped the ball slightly, but great conversation, great questions and a great presentation. So thank you very much Mike, for giving up giving up an hour of your time. I know you've got A, a very busy role, but also a very busy day and thank you to all of those who've joined us.

I just wanted to let you know that the next event is 20th of October and we have Senator Susan McDonald coming along, which will be amazing.

There will be a calendar invite circulated in the lead up to the event, so I'd encourage you all to come along to the next one and also let anyone else know about how wonderful these short sessions are.

If you are interested in being added to an email distribution list, then you're not already on it, please just get in touch with Anne. I don't know if Anne can check her email in the chat or something rather than me read out so. Thank you again all, have a wonderful weekend. Thanks again to Anne and a very, very big thank you virtually to Mike Guerin from AgForce. Thank you all, have a great day.