

The World Is Run by Those Who Show Up®

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INTRODUCTION

The title of my talk is a quote that Dr. Burl Long from the University of Florida told our class at my first meeting with the Wedgworth Leadership Institute. The intent of the Wedgworth Leadership Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources (<<http://wlianr.ifas.ufl.edu/>>) is to develop and refine the leadership capabilities of young leaders who, in turn, will be prepared to become increasingly involved in policy formation on behalf of agriculture.

THE PROGRAM

Let me start by explaining a little bit about this program, and add that there are programs very similar to this one in other states in the Southeastern U.S.A. The program consists of class members, similar to a school class, except that each class is selected once every 3 years. Each class consists of up to 30 people, between the ages of 25 and 50, who make the majority of their income from agriculture, natural resources, or other related industries. The class is a state-wide mixture of individuals from different sectors of agriculture, including ornamental horticulture, timber, cattle, citrus, vegetables, row crops, fertilizer producers, etc.

Over the course of 2 years, our class met together for 1 week, every other month, usually in a different city, and with a different purpose and format for each meeting. The program begins with an introspective evaluation of oneself, and expands outwards to explore local, then state, national, and international governments — and how policy is formed and influenced. At the end of the 1st year, the class takes a national trip to Washington, D.C., and another area of the U.S.A. In 2008, energy was the big issue and our class went to the U.S.A. Midwest to explore “green energy.” The current 2011 class just returned from a trip to New Mexico and Arizona to survey life along the border with Mexico. The final seminar for each class includes an international trip. When my class went to China and Vietnam in 2009, China was “taking over the world”. So, we traveled to Asia to see what was happening. The class that is preparing for their international trip next summer will travel to France and the Netherlands. I assume it relates to the economic meltdown in Europe and fiduciary issues facing the European Union (EU).

THE SEMINARS

The first seminar focused on personal behavior, attitude, problem solving, and individual growth. It included doing a rope course, taking a number of personality tests, and focusing on interactions between individuals.

The second seminar was in Miami. We spent a week looking at the issues that major metropolitan areas face. We went from the Port of Miami to the Everglades to Little Havana, and from the Miami Herald newspaper to a homeless shelter, and all points in between. We were there in the Winter of 2008, and did not realize that we were witnessing the beginning of the economic meltdown. Some of the people

we talked to in Miami were commenting on an odd problem of not being able to sell some of the new condos that had just been built downtown. This was a problem that nobody in Miami could ever remember experiencing in recent times.

Next we were off to Tallahassee. There we spent several days meeting with folks at the Florida State Capitol. We sat in on an Ag Coalition meeting where lobbyists from the Florida State Associations for Forestry, Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA), Farm Bureau, citrus and cattle industries, and the University of Florida - IFAS, met to resolve the different problems that they were facing in an attempt to help each other with the issues during the current legislative session. From there we "shadowed" lobbyists from our respective associations as they crisscrossed the capitol for meetings with legislators, cabinet members, or their aides. We had a meeting with the Florida Commissioner of Agriculture. Some of the commissioner's hot topics were invasive pests, including citrus canker and sudden oak death.

Two months later we were in the Florida Panhandle to learn about small, rural cities and communities. We visited timber operations, the Buckeye Cellulose Mill, and an ocean biology / seafood testing lab. We spent a day in the Apalachicola Bay learning about the science of oyster farming, including actually harvesting oysters. During this period in 2008, we were in the middle of a multi-year prolonged drought. We had meetings with several environmental groups, the Apalachicola River Keeper (a nonprofit organization made up of professional staff, volunteers and members who monitor the Apalachicola), and oyster farmers who had one issue: Force Atlanta to stop using water out of Lake Lanier. Now to most of the folks in our group, this meant nothing. But to me it was like a blow to my stomach. Water in Lake Lanier, as most of you know, is what keeps the landscaping business afloat in Atlanta! My customers need that water...therefore I need for them to have it! Yet to most of the people around me, even agriculturally minded people in a state with limited water supply, the solution was simple: Make them stop...right? This is the problem with one-sided arguments!

Next, we began preparing for our national trip for Fall 2008. Our first stop was Washington, D.C., where we spent 5 days. We met with representatives; senators, their aides; lobbyists; activists; and one self-proclaimed radical. One of the unwritten goals of the leadership program is to see various sides of different arguments. The class is not about specific issues per se. Rather it deals with how to manage and address different issues. Part of that process is gathering information and learning what is behind the opposing side. The goal of our director, Dr. Hannah Carter, was to take the class out of their comfort zone as frequently as possible. That was a very effective learning tool, but hard to swallow at times.

One morning in Washington we met with a labor organizer whose first word to our group of farmers was: "Liberals are too conservative for me. I am a radical, and if I could have 10 min in front of your labor crews, I would have your entire organization unionized before you went home that night." You should have seen all the good ol' boys in the room squirming in their chairs as we listened to this man talk for 20 min.

We talked with environmentalists who want genetically modified crops banned and organic crops mandated nationwide. We heard from animal rights groups that wanted dairy farms, feed lots, and hog farms outlawed. On the flip-side, we visited the U.S. Chamber of Commerce who showed us how they were fighting for legal reforms, expansion of domestic energy, tax reform, and more.

From Washington we flew west to Des Moines, Iowa, to watch corn and beans being harvested, and subsequently processed not for food, but rather for fuel. It was staggering. Ethanol manufacturing plants are strategically located all across the U.S.A. Midwest in an effort to capture as much of a corn harvest as possible. Specifically we toured two ethanol plants, and one of the most striking contradictions I saw throughout my experience with the Wedgworth Leadership Institute was the sight of three semi-loads lined-up, waiting to dump their coal load into the on-site power-plant. That is correct! Ethanol plants use thousands of loads of coal to make “clean” fuel. Go figure! We also visited a wind farm, a hog farm, and several corn and bean farms.

The stock market began to crash while we were in Des Moines, and it continued to get worse as we toured the Chicago Mercantile Exchange a few days later. Oil was falling. Corn prices were falling, stocks were falling. It was certainly an interesting time to visit the trading floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange!

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

Preparation had begun for our international seminar to China, Vietnam, and Hong Kong. A 13-h flight was followed by 3 weeks of chopsticks and questionable meals — three times a day. We started off in Shanghai then an overnight train-ride to Beijing. From there we took a flight west to Xi’an, home of the Terra Cotta Soldiers, and down to tropical Nanning. There we crossed the border on foot into Vietnam and took a bus to Ha Long Bay. Next was a bus ride south to Hanoi and a flight to Hong Kong. During all of this time, we visited the U.S.A. embassy, went to a silk factory, met rice and citrus farmers, and visited their villages and homes. We saw the Great Wall...which was one of the largest failures in the history of mankind and pretty much sums up the senseless excess of previous Chinese regimes. They build things that they do not need, just for the sake of saying that they built it, and it is still continues.

OBSERVATIONS OF CHINA, VIETNAM, AND HONG KONG

I will share a few observations about China, Vietnam, and Hong Kong. First of all, we should thank the Lord that we live in America. We are very fortunate. The people of China are still oppressed, and much of their news and influence is heavily censored.

Secondly, the communists are very good capitalists. They do not let pesky issues, such as human-rights and pollution get in the way of making money. There is smog everywhere — and it is constant. Everyday felt like a cloudy day, but if you looked up, there was not a cloud in the sky.

China does not have trees like we do in the U.S.A. Virtually every tree in China was cut down during the 1950s to fuel the steel mills — not because China needed steel, but because Mao wanted to exceed the United States in steel manufacturing, just to say he had done it. All of their mountains that I saw must have been completely logged and replanted within the past 40 years.

The landscaping in China was comical by our standards. We would consider most of their street trees as trash trees: camphor, sycamore, China berry, *Koelruteria* — rain tree, *Ailanthus* — tree-of-heaven, etc. Vegetable gardens are everywhere, in ditches beside the interstate, completely surrounding most apartments, on roofs, and patios. One gets the feeling that China has trouble feeding itself.

The size and scope of population is staggering. The city of Beijing has 20 million residents, while Shanghai has 23 million, and that is just within the city. To put this into perspective, the entire state of Florida has a population of about 18 million. Construction is everywhere in China, but mostly in the form of government apartment housing. Much of China seems to be new and shiny.

Conversely, construction appeared to be non-existent in Vietnam. Vietnam seems old and crumbling. The country of Vietnam is beautiful with great food, very friendly people, and ironically, all items priced in U.S.A. dollars.

While most of my photos are from the international trip, I will let the images speak for themselves, while I try to stay on message. The fact that you all are here at IPPS tells me a couple of things about you. Look around you. We are survivors — so far. Not only are we survivors, but we are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to make our businesses better. Nurseries do not develop on their own. It takes hard work, constant supervision, and the need to adapt to changing times. And the times are changing faster now than ever. We have to continue to pursue greatness, and we have to keep learning. Learning about new trends, plants and technologies — and learning from our mistakes. We can never stop learning! Ask Charlie Parkerson if he thinks he has learned enough to settle down and stop all this dang learning.

LISTEN TO WHAT I AM SAYING

If you are still willing to learn, then listen to what I am about to say. There are people out there who want you to go out of business!! There are organizations with deep pockets and offices next to the White House who want nothing less than a socialized, organic, utopia — and you are in their way! Or if you are not in their way, you need to be!

Sometimes it is hardest for a business owner to “see the forest for the trees.” While you are lying in bed at night trying to figure out if your business is strong enough to survive the economy, you should also be wondering if you can withstand the U.S. Federal Government. There are people trying to figure out how to clean-up the Chesapeake Bay. Or they might just need Atlanta to stop using water. Or else they wonder if we could just fence off the border with Mexico once and for all — so their brother-in-law might find a job. It is starting to feel like those Tea Party folks might not be quite as level headed as we initially thought!

IMMIGRATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT ISSUES

Halsey Beshears of Simpson Nursery is the current President for FNGLA and also a graduate of the Wedgworth Leadership Program. Let me tell you a story from his latest monthly letter to the FNGLA membership. On a recent trip to Washington, he was fortunate enough to sit in on a U.S. Congressional hearing on immigration and unemployment. Three of the people testifying were business owners including one nurseryman, while the fourth was a labor lawyer. When the lawyer was asked how Congress could change and get unemployed Americans to work in the agricultural industry, he responded by stating it was simple: growers just need to pay higher wages and provide better working conditions and Americans will do the work. He argued that by increasing our labor costs and passing it onto the consumer, American agriculture would have a consistent and steady labor force. This is the type of advice that Congress routinely hears.

My point is not to scare you specifically. It is to inform you that we are fighting a battle whether you are engaged or not. “To those whom much is given, much

is expected” — This quote has been used by many Presidents, including John F. Kennedy and George W. Bush.

You might ask what you have been given? First of all, we have a great industry to work in — even if we might be limping on a broken leg right now. The business might have been given to you by an older generation, or it might have been developed by a younger version of yourself who worked hard to build the life that you have now. More than that, we have been entrusted with the future. If you are nearing retirement and you do not have a succession plan, then you probably are not at this IPPS meeting. If you want to see your business succeed after you, if you want the nursery industry to thrive once again, if you have hope for the future, then you have an obligation to see this through.

SO WHAT DO WE DO? WHERE DO WE START?

Begin at home by becoming a member of your state nursery association. It is not very expensive, and they go to bat for you every day, whether it is for some permit fee or storm water run-off code that they stop before you ever hear about it, or they manage to keep onerous immigration law pushed off a little longer. George Hackney told me that he fully believes that one of the things that kept Florida from hammering us with an immigration law this year was from information the FNGLA received from the Georgia Green Industry Association (GGIA) after they lost their battle in Atlanta. Volunteer at your State Association — they always need help.

Next, you need to be a member of the American Nursery and Landscape Association (ANLA). I know that it is expensive. May Nursery has been paying those dues for longer than I have been alive. But it's important! Some folks might visit Washington, D.C. once a year to “make the rounds on Capitol Hill,” but ANLA is there every day — as are your congressmen and senators, environmental groups, and labor unions. It's important to have someone there standing up for *us*! ANLA is helping you right now, today, whether you are a paying member, or riding other Nurseries' coat-tails.

Join the Southern Nursery Association (SNA). The SNA is back in operation with its research conference, and plans for the state officers conference, as well as a “State of the Industry” workshop this winter. If you can afford it, join them all — including other states' associations. Our nursery is a member of more than ten state associations east of the Mississippi River. Is it important to May Nursery what happens in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Georgia, or Alabama — absolutely! We are in this fight together. If my customers depend on it, then we depend on it too.

Other organizations that fight for us are the state Farm Bureau, the American Farm Bureau, your local, state, and national Chambers of Commerce, and the National Federation of Independent Business.

Get to work!

- Become knowledgeable of the issues.
- Be engaged and immersed in the policy process.
- Be open minded about solutions.
- Make things happen rather than watch things happen...or worse yet, wonder what happened.
- Understand that it is “not all about you.” However, nobody is better prepared to fight this battle than you!
- Get off the bench and be a player. Do not trade a walk-on part in the war for a lead role in a cage.
- You are either at the table, or on the menu.