



ARLP Course 29 Participant Final Report

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My name is Timothy Brennan, I am 26 years of age living in a country town north of Toowoomba called Crows Nest. I am a proud fifth generation beef producer and I work as the Feedlot Livestock Manager at NH Foods - Whyalla Beef in Texas. When I'm not working at the feedlot, I'm heavily involved with my family's farming business which I would love to keep progressing through the next generation. I'm involved in community groups such as Rural Fire Brigade Service and I enjoy team sports. Growing up, I've always gravitated to team sports as I love competition and building connections. Having the right words to say has always been something I struggled with, and so I learnt to lead with my actions. I've always enjoyed working for others rather than having others work for me.

I applied for this program for an opportunity to improve my leadership ability, to gain a voice and build my confidence. Back in 2021 I started on my leadership journey in a management role at Whyalla Beef. From managers before, I had seen what I thought to be good and bad leadership and I made up my own presumptions of what I wanted to be like as a leader. At this point in my career, I thought leadership was a verb, it is something that you did. This program has taught me it's not something you do, it's something you are. Before the ARLP I was very naive, this program has been a great opportunity to shake my way of thinking, trigger my concise and highlight my biases. I solely believe now; I have started building solid foundations for my future in leadership.

I never actually thought that I was good enough to get into the ARLP. I thought it was only on offer for exceptional people. I suffered with imposter syndrome at the start of the program and struggled to come to grips with what I had got myself into. The Kimberly experience was a pivotal moment in my life. I began to stop being my hardest critique, I started believing I was where I was for a reason, not by chance and I started growing in confidence. This moment in my life has really given me the motivation and inspiration to do anything.

Thanks to the ARLP, I know as an individual who I am, I know my values and my drivers. The center of my life is family, family drives my passion, my loyalty, respect, and trust. These are the values that energise me every day and make me want to be the best version of myself. Gaining this self-identify has triggered my self-awareness and authenticity. I am now so passionate about self-identity and awareness that I want to inspire others.

Cohort 29 of the Australian Rural Leadership Program saw a diverse and unique group of individuals coming together from all parts of Australia. Many of the participants came from differing industries, with differing skill sets and differing perspectives. I am grateful to be a part of this cohort and to be able to network with such great people. It is from the interaction with, sharing stories with and observing of these people that I take away most of my key learnings. I believe this is the beautiful concept about the ARLP, it is not designed to give every participant the same learnings, in fact it is designed for individuals to take away their own learnings, learnings that are established through experiences and reflection. Every experience is seen differently in the eyes of the participants, it is what is relevant to them that they keep. There is no right or wrong, it is just different when it comes to leadership, the ARLP has done a great job of showcasing this. It's like no other program or course where participants are forced to learn concepts and recall, it is solely about giving the participants experiences so they can form their own reflections and learnings.

The program was designed to partake over four sessions on an average of two weeks per session in different locations around Australia and overseas. Each session directly links to a key fundamental of leadership. On our first journey we spent two weeks learning about self-identity and awareness in the dry and hot Kimberly. We then traveled around drought and fire ravaged communities, learning about resilience in East Gippsland. We interacted with Māori culture in Aotearoa and witnessed the importance of connection and affiliation. Finally, we unearthed the importance of action and advocacy in Canberra. The opportunities that this program has provided and the way in which I have been challenged have been second to none. It has given me the confidence to speak in places where I have felt I don't have a voice; it has given me the confidence to step up when I would much rather stand behind and it has turned on my self-awareness.

The most significant change that I've noticed about myself since going on this program is the increase in my social awareness. Reading behavior, attitudes and working out what's going on in the room without talking is something that I've really started to get a grasp of. Emotional intelligence has really helped me in my day-to-day work life, being able to depict mindsets before engaging in conversations. I am a big advocate of the Iceberg theory, which explains that behavior we see (tip of the iceberg) is driven by what we can't see (mindset, values, beliefs – under water). Being better equipped to read the room with social awareness has helped me to find an approach that better meets the needs/mindsets/beliefs of the room and results in a more desirable outcome.

Self-awareness is also something that I've truly developed throughout the program. I have become a lot more aware of myself and my conscience. The Kimberley session really helped me work out who I am as an individual and what my key values are. My identity has become clear to me, and this has made me more accountable to myself and authentic to others. As guardrails on the highway keep the traffic from veering off the road, establishing my identity has helped steer me towards my natural self. Authenticity is a huge fundamental as a leader and so it is important that I have established my guardrails to keep me on my leadership journey. I look back on my self-awareness and it's one of the biggest things that I've been gifted by this program. I'm very grateful to have the ability to question myself and be better for others not just better for myself.

On returning home from the Kimberley session, I transformed at work. The time up in Western Australia helped me establish my key core values as part of my identity, with family at the core of my values and all other values flowing off that it made me think how I could incorporate that into my work life. I felt like I needed to start treating my colleagues like they're part of a bigger family. That really changed my ideology around work and how I interacted with others. I began putting out more for others, giving others more time and doing what I could to help. Everyone around me saw a change and was surprised. I even had colleagues come up and ask me what happened in the Kimberley because I had come back a different person. This was a rewarding experience for me and something I cherish.

Before the ARLP I got into the trap of seeing employees as workers, not as people. The program has really opened my eyes to seeing people as unique human beings with different skills and attributes. There is no good or bad, just different and every person can have a part to play in a team environment. It's up to the leader of the group to get the best out of everyone. I now crave the opportunity to work with, interact and grow with others. Ultimately, we are all a part of something much bigger than ourselves.

This program has highlighted to me how fortunate I am. A \$50,000 scholarship doesn't come out of the woodwork, it is a substantial investment made by people and industry with a passion for growing leadership in rural regional and remote Australia. Only a select few get to experience this rare and unique opportunity. The ARLP has given me the inspiration to influence others, to give others an opportunity like I've experienced. I've developed a distinct passion for emerging leadership and believe there are more opportunities out there to grow our next generation of leaders. This program has really set fire in my belly towards growing leadership in emerging individuals.

Coming from the Lot Feeding Industry, the opportunities for people that are go-getters are exceptional. However, all other individuals that have potential but not necessarily the support or opportunity miss out. I see huge opportunities for these people to grow with a little bit of support, networking, and self-awareness. It doesn't take much to frame up the foundations of leadership to really build leadership potential. I believe that's something that the Lot Feeding Industry can do better on and that's something that I'd love to work on. The biggest issue pressing Lot Feeders currently is having the ability to recruit and retain staff, to me this comes down a lot to leadership. Our largest portion of workers are on the ground every day and our best leaders aren't necessarily on the ground supporting their teams. I'd love to work with industry in building more learning and growing opportunities for these emerging leaders that are on the ground working with staff day in day out. These are the people that can make a significant impact on the Lot Feeding Industry.

The importance of networking and affiliation to me is around building good support networks. No building can stand without strong support and the same goes with every great leader. I'm a big believer that you are a product of the people you surround yourself with, establishing a strong network of leaders around you will only help you develop, grow, and withstand any challenges that may present themselves. For me being the youngest on the program, I struggled to find my feet and found myself suffering imposter syndrome when comparing myself to the quality of participants. After building relationships with these people and forming networks I grew in confidence. I knew I had a support network that wanted the best for me and that really helped me through the program. Leadership can be a lonely journey when you are standing up when no one else will or you are leading the way in tough times so having a support network is important. I hope at the conclusion of this program I can continue to hold these strong networks as a foundation of my development.

Fortunately, I haven't been exposed to major crisis or disasters in my career, but I believe the program has equipped me with the tools to deal with challenge and adversity. I learnt a lot about resilience in East Gippsland. I have come to the realisation that resilience is not about how much pressure you can take or how strong you are in a crisis, it is about how prepared you are for crisis and what strategies you are putting in place to mitigate the impacts of crisis. This whole piece about preparedness and strategy was a key takeaway from our resilience discussions for me.

The program has also taught me a lot about controlling thoughts. I've learnt that I can deal with most challenges if I'm in the right mental state. Being able to control my thoughts and have the intelligence to not dwell on the negativities is important. There are always positives to be found in every situation and a positive mindset is more times than not going to help me out of crisis that I'm entrenched in.

Before joining the ARLP I had little knowledge about the 6 leadership practices encouraged by the ARLF. However, naturally, and unconsciously, we live by parts of these principles every day. For me witnessing these principles firsthand has lit up my subconscious, to be more aware of leadership fundamentals and it has motivated me to be a better leader. Here is how the program has developed my leadership fundamentals:

Advocacy

The program has made me very passionate about leadership with its opportunities and rewards. Witnessing the growth of myself and fellow participants on the course has given me inspiration to get more out of others around me. This has led to me becoming an advocate of leadership at my workplace and at an industry level. I believe there is so much potential to be realised with leadership, especially in my industry. I've got the program to thank for giving me such passion for leadership and the desire to advocate for it.

Awareness

Being highly conscientious, the ARLP has rationalised a lot of my thought process and reflections. I believe self-awareness is about being self-conscious. This was something I naturally exercised before the program but without realising it was a leadership concept. Being able to unearth the meaning of self-awareness has really helped me make sense of why I think and act the way I do. It also has triggered more consciousness of my actions and behaviors. For me, awareness is the starting block of leadership because if you don't have self-awareness, you don't know who you are and you can't see how you impact others. I believe through the participation of the ARLP I have developed awareness as one of my key leadership strengths.

Action

I've always been an action-based person, words have never been my strong point. This program has really highlighted to me the importance of actions. I've learnt that it is important for leaders to walk the talk. Furthermore, a leader won't ask peers to do what they wouldn't do themselves. These two lessons reside with me very well. Acts of service is another concept that I have really adopted from the ARLP. It doesn't matter what your title or status is, doing acts of service for others is a powerful tool in building healthy culture. The random acts of service throughout the ARLP have highlighted to me how much of a positive impact can be left on others with simple gestures. An action can speak a thousand words. I have enjoyed incorporating acts of service into my work life and I believe it has helped me form stronger connections and trust with my peers.

Authenticity

Authenticity to me is consistency. It's remaining true to myself and true to others. Providing day in day out consistent leadership. The ARLP has really taught me about remaining true to myself and owning who I am. No one is perfect, there is no such thing as perfect. What is real is my identity and that's something that I shouldn't change as a leader. I believe authenticity ties in well with self-awareness. In forming that identity of who you are and understanding what drives your behavior, you can establish a benchmark that you hold yourself accountable to. You maintain your behavior in a way that is going to meet the needs of your peers. Being consistent for me is always something that I strived to be whether it is through my work ethic or through the way I speak to people, I always try to remain consistent. This program has really taught me the importance of doing that and how it has an impact on others.

Adaption

Adaption is a principle that would be my weakest leadership characteristic. Throughout my life I've been very structurally minded. Whether it is problem solving or just dealing with the day-to-day challenges, I struggle getting out of the black and white view, often I need to be in the grey. This leadership principle introduced by the ARLP has really tested me to be flexible, to go with the flow and trust the process. Being able to trust others rather than having to know the details, that's been something that I've really been challenged with. The ARLP has highlighted to me that adaption is something that I need to continue to challenge myself with. We don't live in a black and white world and if we are change adverse, we will be left behind.

Affiliation

Affiliation and connection are leadership qualities that I've always desired. Being part of a team and that feeling of being valued, that's something that I love. The ARLP program for me has driven home the importance of affiliation in establishing strong networks. No famous leader in the world had the impact they made without a strong support team behind them. I believe that you're a product of the people that you surround yourself with so making the effort to surround yourself with good people is going to rub off on you as a leader. Leadership can be a lonely journey, so developing networks to support you is essential. I like to look at team sports and the connection that people have playing team sports. The hours spent together; the sacrifices made for each other, the acts of service. This is really the pinnacle of affiliation and what it can deliver. I love to relate this back to my leadership and working environment.

Firsthand, I have witnessed the work of the ARLF and its impact on regional, rural, and remote Australia. Coming from rural backgrounds I see many challenges; I see issues with labor shortages and lack of leadership. I see the important of the ARLF in developing, culturing, and nurturing leadership out in regional, rural, and remote Australia to ensure these areas thrive. As a participant of the program, I would love to help to continue to support the program and my alumni network with whatever need is required. I'd love to maintain strong networks with my cohort and continue to support members and be part of something that's a lot bigger than myself.

I can't share my gratitude and appreciation enough to the Australian Lot Feeders Association (ALFA) for providing me this incredible opportunity. This program changes lives and sets up the foundations for a successful future in leadership. I still can't believe I was fortunate enough to earn a place on the program. I have so many years ahead in my life and career and receiving this gift of experience at such a young age is going to hold me in great stead. The program has instilled in me a passion for leadership, and I hope to use this passion to drive the growth of others moving forward in my career. I'm a passionate person, I'm passionate about what I do, and I love sharing that passion. I look forward to providing back to the industry and supporting future leaders like ALFA has done for me.