



WHAT DID JOHN ALVIS SAY AT THE JOHN ALLISTON MEMORIAL LECTURE ABOUT MOTIVATION AND LEADERSHIP?

The whole subject of motivation and leadership was, of course, one very close to Professor John Alliston. For many years he was instrumental in the organisation of the IAGRM Leadership Course.

How fitting then that his very good friend and colleague, John Alvis OBE, was chosen to give the inaugural memorial lecture at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre last week and what a good lecture it was!

Not least, it was just that – a proper lecture, not as is often the case these days, a power point presentation with some extra words. In 40 minutes or so, John spoke from what looked like to me, no apparent notes, but ran through a whole host of subjects in a coherent and at times entertaining fashion.

Among the areas he touched on included as follows:

- The need to display a combination of knowledge, determination and enthusiasm to get the highest level of performance possible from everyone in a business
- That this is a two-way process - leaders must gain the respect of those that they manage, and at the same time, respect those that they are managing
- He stated that in his own (highly successful, I should add) business, the organisational chart was turned upside down from the norm – with the operational staff and teams being just as, if not more, important than the managers and Directors
- Learning how to manage and motivate people was a constant challenge and he believed strongly in giving responsibility to staff and pursuing a deliberate open door and communication policy with all colleagues
- Being able to acknowledge at times when you get it wrong. He talked about the need to sometimes make ruthless decisions, but at the same time, making the execution of these compassionate
- The need to have clear boundaries of responsibility, with key KPIs set that are accurate and relevant and look to create a “no excuses environment”
- He firmly believed in paying people as well as possible, even generously, but making bonuses modest – too many things are sometimes beyond the control of individuals to always ensure these. The biggest rewards of all in his experience was the sheer satisfaction of seeing a job well done and being in control of your own targets and achievements
- John also talked about what he called “the incredible willingness” in agriculture for people to share information and knowledge on what makes for best practise. He referred to the role of a wide range of organisations, such as the NFU, AHDB, CLA, LEAF, the Worshipful Company of Farmers and the IAGRM etc to work together to create an environment of ongoing professional development and what he went on to describe as “life time networks”
- John believes that leaders are not necessarily naturally born, but skills development and experience can all make sure the attributes required to be a good leader (and motivate staff) can be developed over time
- There is a critical need to invest in young people, not just in agriculture and farming and we need to be far better at the whole succession process than we have in the past. In fact, he went as far as to say “agriculture has been shocking at this”. A good manager will give the right person the right opportunity at the right times – and make sure they have the skills to do this too.



Finally, on what I thought was a deeply personal note, bearing in mind why we were at this event in the first place, John implored us to take our jobs seriously for most of the time, but remember to have fun and enjoy it too, and most importantly of all, never forget our families and make sure we get the work/life balance right at the various stages of our careers.

All this of course would have been music to the ears of John Alliston himself who was a great believer in all these things. The panel debate which then sparked from the lecture between Lord Iveagh, John Alvis OBE and Professor John Wibberley took questions from the floor ably chaired by the current IAGRM Chairman, Martin Wilkinson. But it was Malcolm Stansfield who had the last word of the evening (not for the first time in his career!) and gave just about the most appropriate summing up for this sort of event I think I have ever heard. Well done Malcolm!

Let's hope it is hoped this becomes an annual event as a fitting tribute to Professor John Alliston who spent a lifetime, literally looking to inspire, manage and lead us all in his various roles. He will be missed.

John Giles

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