



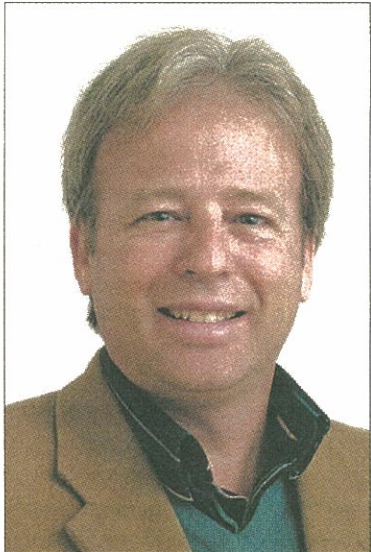
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The Executive Coach, a trainer for your farm business



Robert Savage
Agronome, MBA
CEO Solutions affaires
experts-conseils

The Caldwell family was losing money, that much they knew. The bills were piling up and the cash flow had melted down like an ice cream cone under a broiler grill. However, they could neither figure out where the leakages were occurring, nor how many of them they were. Before the financial health of their farm was in serious peril, however, they felt it was high time to put their farm on a strict diet and to get a professional trainer. Enter the 'Executive Coach'.

Like any other professionals, the executive coach seeks not only to perform his job properly, but to ensure that, as well, everybody else's job is carried out properly. The first and most important member of the action team is the farm owner himself.

Be aware

Knowing that you might have a problem is certainly a step in the right direction, however, it might not guarantee that you will be willing to go down the path that leads to recovery. To raise consciousness that things could and should be done differently in order to improve your farm business is not as easy as it may seem. After all, you used the same recipe with some successes over the last two decades, therefore, why should it be changed? Even though your recipe might still prove to get some satisfactory results, would you be willing to consider that these results could be even better? Having an open mind and being willing to step out of your oh-so-comfortable slippers certainly gives you the necessary latitude to efficiently reposition your farm business.

Choose your allies

Improving the performance of your farm also requires that you can count on the best team in order to attain your goals. Therefore, you need to evaluate your staff members, as well as all the professionals involved in your farm business. If qualified manpower proves to be difficult to find, do not hesitate to appeal to the expertise of other professionals to establish whether or not you have the best players on your team. Recognize that a long-standing business relationship can certainly bias your judgement. For this reason you need to rely on the objectivity of your executive coach.

Apply the rules

The first mandate of the executive coach is to identify the sources of the financial losses and to establish a priority list. A

global assessment of the Caldwell's dairy farm business clearly demonstrated that a combination of feed costs, veterinary and medication fees, was, like the Titanic, the iceberg threatening their enterprise. With an expense rate of \$18 per hectolitre, the goal was immediately set to a more acceptable \$10. This goal was attained within one year, thus leaving the Caldwell family with a saving of \$8 a hectolitre, amounting to a total of \$160,000 for an annual dairy production of 20,000 hectolitres.

To achieve this improvement the business was required to adopt a new animal feed adviser, as well a more stringent preventive medicine strategy. Asking for advice is one thing, applying it is another.

Maximize your potential

Evaluating your situation, identifying strategies and setting goals is the joint responsibility of your executive coach and you. Once you have stopped the major financial leaks, it is time to undertake the fine tuning, that is to maximize your farm's potential. Does the quality of your forage need improvement? Is your herd housed too close for comfort? Every detail counts. Some aspects will have more impact, others less, but when all is said and done, the improvements will be tangible and profitable.

Ultimately, trust and communication are the keys to success in establishing an efficient relationship with your executive coach, as well as with all the resources involved in your farm business. With the support of a consistent follow up, monthly

and even weekly in some cases, you will be able to promptly detect and rectify any loss of control. One should always keep in mind that the shortest plank of the barrel determines how much water the barrel can hold.

Having worked for over 16 years for various organizations—including the Caisse populaire Desjardins, the Office du crédit agricole du Québec and Farm Credit Canada—Robert Savage, founder of Solutions affaires experts-conseils, has established an innovated approach to farm consulting services. With the help of a multidisciplinary team of experts, Solutions affaires experts-conseils can get your farm on its way to greater profitability by working with your existing resources and by having access to a network of professionals involved in agri-business.



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