

Western Morning News

THE VOICE OF THE WESTCOUNTRY

Playing fast and loose with UK's ability to feed itself

Today's report that there could be vegetable shortages and that some early spring crops could be delayed because of the weather are unlikely to spark anything more than mild concern among the nation's foodies. After all, no one is going hungry because a few potatoes aren't available in the shops as early as they might be.

But this news does illustrate a potential problem that ought to focus minds in government and, specifically at Defra, as we head closer to the EU exit door. We are still not entirely clear what the farm support regime will look like once we are outside the European Union.

The strong hint from Defra Secretary Michael Gove points towards rewards for delivering so-called "public goods" like improvements to the environment, and moving away from direct support based on holding land and keeping it in good productive order, as is the case today.

An army of conservationists have seized upon this change of emphasis as an opportunity to alter the countryside for the better, reverse some declines in wildlife and generally turn the clock back to an era of greater biodiversity. Few of us wouldn't support that. But at what cost? Behind the scenes, it appears that Defra and its Secretary of State

don't mind too much if the impact of the subsidy support changes leave many British farmers facing bankruptcy. As the WMN reported earlier this week, as many as a quarter are said by some experts to be at risk and Defra, it is alleged, don't mind that much, figuring, presumably, that imports and maybe some changes in land ownership in Britain mean no one goes hungry.

That seems like a pretty risky position to take, however, given that farm produce, unlike much of the rest of the manufactured output from Britain, is essential to keep us all alive.

A bit of cold snap in early spring is one thing – but a blockade, that prevents imports getting through when our agricultural abilities have been severely curtailed by drastic changes in the subsidy regime would be something entirely different. And it could happen.

We have a breathing space while the subsidies continue roughly as now, presumably to allow time for farm businesses to adapt or, if they prefer, sell-up.

The best outcome, post-Brexit, will be for Britain's farms to have become more productive, our proportion of home-produced food to have increased and the environment to have benefited too. Will ministers devise a new subsidy regime to help that happen? Let's see.



Famous miscommunicators Basil (John Cleese) and Manuel (Andrew Sachs) in the BBC comedy, Fawlty Towers

How courageous conversations lead to proper communication

There is a method to avoiding miscommunication, writes **Karen O'Donnell**

How sure are you that what you think you are communicating is reaching the person you are talking to?

"The single biggest problem in communication... is the illusion that it has taken place," is how George Bernard Shaw put it.

Frequently we experience miscommunication where part of the information is lost or misunderstood. We believe that communication has occurred, but it hasn't! Both people think they understand what has been passed between them, but the ideas they have are not the same. This is where the illusion can be most damaging.

Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone misinterpreting your words, or at a meeting with your colleagues only to realise afterwards that their interpretation of that meeting is very different?

Perhaps you sent an innocent email or text, and the recipient took offence – their interpretation was not your meaning! What causes the problem?

The words we hear and their meanings are filtered through our own unique context grid which is made up of our strongly held opinions, beliefs, and attitudes which have been shaped and reinforced over a lifetime. This results in us all unknowingly putting our own interpretation or spin on the words of others, often creating misunderstanding and hurt feelings.

At work, when you are dependent on someone to get

a task accomplished, it is essential you build a relationship that will lead to open task-related communication.

"Listen with the intent to understand, not the intent to reply," said the American author Stephen Covey. Conversations tend to be defined by what we tell rather than by what we ask. Yet all my coaching experience has taught me that what builds a relationship, solves problems, and moves situations forward, is asking the right questions.

We need to adopt The ABC of Courageous Conversations;

context filter grids and working through likely assumptions that may have been made is essential to improving our ability to handle conversations.

All courageous conversations starts will self-inquiry, which follows the WOW approach.

What happened: without an overlay of our assumptions, what actually happened and how does that make you feel? Who else is it affecting?

Own It: how might you have contributed to this situation? Something you did/did not say or do?

Win-win it for you and the other person: when it's

Tip 2 – Have the end in sight. What is it you want to achieve in this conversation?

Tip 3 – Be patient and Listen. Slow the conversation down. And listen. We all like to be heard – really heard. They may well have insights you hadn't counted on.

Courageous conversations can enhance your working relationship. Making room for them can deepen that connection, communication and collaboration.

Communication is vital in all aspects of work. When communicating, be crystal clear. Where it is appropriate, seek clarification that what you meant was what was understood! "Let me clarify, I'm not sure I explained well. What did you hear me say?"

The skill of inquiry is necessary to identify needs for collaboration among work colleagues and departments and to facilitate such collaboration. In the role of leader or manager, it is needed to create the relationships and the climate that will promote open communication.

Teams at work often consist of a variety of conflicting personalities. Getting to a point where a team can collaborate and work in harmony can be challenging and takes time. Teams can be transformed by actively encouraging courageous conversations and using the art of inquiry.

Tomorrow:

RETAIL Ian L Handford on why the number of charity shops needs to be reduced

the art of enquiry: Asking questions to which you may not already know the answer; building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person, and seeking clarification to understand what is being said.

An objective of every courageous conversation is to enhance the relationship – with a work colleague, family member or friend. With these we can connect, communicate and collaborate more effectively at a deep level of understanding.

Think about an important person in your life that you may be avoiding having "that" conversation with.

Remember, you and the other person use different

resolved, what positive implication will it have for you the other person and family or work?

How does it make you feel? Who else will benefit from this resolution – family/work colleagues? Once you are clear on where you stand with this issue, is there someone you need to have a courageous conversation with? Is there anyone who can influence the desired outcome? Before you start, bear the following in mind.

Tip 1 – park your emotions on the shelf. If you are in an emotional state, this is not the time to have the conversation... wait. Instead, come from a place of curiosity.

Karen O'Donnell is from Toastmasters International, a non-profit educational organisation that teaches public speaking and leadership skills; see toastmasters.org

On this day

1199: Richard I, Coeur de Lion, King of England, was killed in battle.

1830: The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, whose adherents are known as Mormons, was founded by Joseph Smith in New York.

1843: William Wordsworth was appointed Poet Laureate – the day before his 73rd birthday.

1896: The opening ceremony of the first modern Olympic Games was held in Athens.

1909: US Commander Robert Peary became the first man to reach the North Pole.

1917: The United States entered the First World War.

1944: Pay As You Earn income

tax was introduced in Britain. The system was devised by Sir Cornelius Gregg.

1994: The presidents of the African states of Rwanda and Burundi died in a plane crash.

Birthdays

Andre Previn, conductor, 89



Barry Levinson, film director, 76

John Ratzenberger, actor, 71

Michael Rooker, actor, 63

Rory Bremner, impressionist, 57

Paul Rudd, actor, 49 pictured

Thought for the day

2 Corinthians 5:21 – God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.