

# LEADING EXCELLENCE BOOK CASE STUDY



**THE WOODS WAY- GROW REGIONAL  
AUSTRALIA BY FEEDING THE WORLD.**

Written by Brad Jeavons, Co-Author of "Leading Excellence" with Chris Butterworth and Stephen Dargan.

# THE WOODS WAY- GROW REGIONAL AUSTRALIA BY FEEDING THE WORLD.

Gary Bartlam, People and Culture Leader of Woods Group called me up one day, wanting Continuous Improvement training for their people. Woods is a regional Australian company with its head office in Goondiwindi, 5 hours inland from the nearest city, Brisbane. My initial reaction was, "Oh no, not another company looking to train their people in Continuous Improvement skills without focusing on Strategy, Culture and Leadership to ensure it sustains".

But having grown up in the country, working on farms and loving country life, the chance to get back to the country and work with regional people led me to say yes to running the training.....

After driving 5 hours out to Goondiwindi on the morning of the training, narrowly missing rising flood waters that were about to cut off roads into the town, I sat down to listen to the CEO Tom Woods's introduction to the event.

With absolute conviction and passion, Tom Wood stood up and said,

***"We must bring wealth and prosperity to regional Australia, the towns we love, and the towns we raise our families in. Too much of our produce is shipped into the cities and overseas without being value-added. We are dominated by market pricing and receive the lowest margins for all our hard work. Woods will Grow Regional Australia by Feeding the World with value-added manufactured products. Products we have processed, packaged, and added value that we can retain in regional Australia to grow our towns and communities!"***

The room was silent; I was stunned. Tom presented his purpose and vision with such enthusiasm, in a way that was so relevant to his people, that we were all speechless. Finally, the applause started; everyone was fired up, the energy in the room was terrific, and it felt like Woods Group had just won the local football final! I was instantly so pleased I had accepted the long drive out to Goondiwindi to run continuous improvement training that I now knew would become so much more.

The training went ahead, and then coaching to support Tom, Gary, and the rest of the leadership team on what they had: the opportunity to define the Woods Way and lead excellence as they expanded throughout regional Australia. The Woods Way was formed by following the process outlined in Chapter 3. It was formed early in the Woods Excellence Journey and is shown below.



“Grow our people, continuously improve & add value for our customers to create a sustainable future.”

### Growing Regional Australia by Feeding the World

**Do it right the first time,  
don't turn a blind eye**



- Be hard on the process not the person & get to the root cause
- We have a process & follow it to ensure quality & safety
- We call it as it is, set a standard, and be honest with ourselves and each other

**Grow our capability &  
become the best we can**



- Develop career pathways, train & coach to The Woods Way
- Lead from the front to learn & help our team grow
- Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.

**Be part of the team & be  
a team player**



- We work as a team towards our goals & scoreboard to win
- Play to our strengths & support each others weaknesses
- Recognise & celebrate each others achievements

**Continuously improve  
& innovate to achieve  
our goals**



- Be proactive not reactive, plan and prioritise for today and the future
- Communicate regularly & work with everyone in the supply chain to create rhythm
- Be courageous, chase your dreams & goals

**Respect everyone**



- Value & empower our people to achieve great things
- Don't ask someone to do what you wouldn't do yourself
- Understand & respect our internal & external customers

To form the Woods Way, a cross-functional multi-level team was formed to explore the Woods's purpose and culture. The team explored their core purpose and values, exploring commonalities and alignments, of which there were many. The draft Core Values and Purpose were then taken out to employee focus groups, where these were reviewed, and feedback was gained.

Additionally, employees were asked to describe the behaviours we would see if we were living these values and our purpose in the years to come. The data from these sessions was collated and turned into visual mind maps and graphs to enable the team to gain insights. The team knew the importance of chunking: keeping the principles to 3 per value, at most 4, so that it would be memorable. The draft document was returned to employee focus groups for further feedback and refinement.

The Woods Way was in place and ready to be led. The next step was to get the leadership team to remember it. To enable this, I established the Carton of Beer or Wine Challenge. The winner of the challenge would be the person who could recite the Woods Way to a peer in full without looking at the document. It was a close contest, eventually won a few days later by CEO Tom Woods.

Woods Group is leading their certified Adaptive Leaders training aligned to the Woods Way. The leaders of the organisation initially gained some support from me. The organisation's leaders are now the trainers of this course, building mastery in their skills and helping support the wearing of the other Adaptive Leader hats of Support, Coach and Direct. Helping their team members learn and grow capability in the Woods Way.

An organisation like Woods is an ecosystem, like the analogy of the Coral we previously mentioned. Woods now has the centrepiece of their organisation ecosystem that can guide and support everything they do to grow their people through improving their ability to lead the Woods Way as Adaptive Leaders. We will explore critical systems and leadership behaviours more deeply throughout the remainder of this book to help organisations achieve greatness through Leading Excellence.



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