

Byland gets 100 years of Experience

(By: Judy Walters and Lorne Owen)

Most people know Kelowna farmer John **Byland** as the successful proprietor of **Byland's Nurseries Ltd.** What many don't know is that 12 years ago John's father died of cancer, leaving John, at the tender age of 24, to run the family's wholesale nursery business.

A student at the time, John had not really been expecting to take over the farm. "I believe life deals you a certain deck of cards. You do the best you can with what you've got," he says. When John took over, he knew he, "lacked the experience and management skills" needed to fill the breach left by his father's untimely death.

Shortly before his father's death John had heard Leon **Danco**, President of the Cleveland based Centre for Family Business Review, speak about advisory councils at a farm management seminar. "What **Danco** advocated," explains **Byland**, "was setting up a body of people outside the business to provide advice on managing the business." That's exactly what **Byland** did. He found three retired business executives with "over 100 years of experience between them" to sit on **Byland's Nurseries advisory council.** **Byland** and his wife **Marla**, his mother **Katie**, and their accountant **Stewart Campbell** comprise the balance of the Board of Directors.

Over the past 10 years, retired businessmen **Allan Mitchell**, **Jim Eccott**, and **Jim Grindlay** have provided **Byland** with "invaluable advice". At first, the advisers helped **Byland** get his feet under him. Since then they've

served primarily as a "sounding board," says **Byland**. Although the council members hold no real power, **Byland** structured the council so that he had to justify his plans to them. **Byland** recalls wanting to buy a new tractor. "The council made me prove I needed it. I had to provide them with facts and figures to show it would pay for itself."

Council members have advised **Byland** on capital expenditures, expansion plans, land purchases, building construction and equipment acquisitions. They've advised him on sales, marketing and contract negotiation. They've helped him with a range of personnel management issues from salary raises to dismissals. They've taught him the importance of cash flow management. A few years ago they helped him prepare a strategic plan for the business. Ultimately, **Byland** is free to take or ignore his advisers' advice. For the most part, he has taken it.

Over the past decade, the advisory team has seen **Byland** take over from his father and double the size of the business. Today, **Byland** oversees 250 acres and 100 employees. He ships woody ornaments all over Western Canada and supplies fruit trees to orchardists in the Okanagan and Lower Mainland. His wife runs their retail outlet, **Byland's Garden Centre Ltd.** in Kelowna.

Selecting Advisors

When **Byland** went looking for people to sit on his Board of Directors, he realized he wasn't going to be able to find nursery people with the depth of experience he

wanted. But he wasn't overly concerned. **Danco** had pointed out that getting people from your line of business isn't necessary or even necessarily desirable. Asking people from other fields of endeavour to sit on your council is advisable because they bring new ideas and perspectives to the table.

In **Byland's** estimation, the two qualities that are most important when selecting advisors are, business acumen and shared values. **Byland** was clear he did not want a lawyer, accountant or insurance agent on his Advisory Council. He wanted business people who had been successful in their own right. "You can get accounting or legal advice," he says. "What's hard to get is good common sense advice. Common sense advice is worth a lot. You can plan and figure, but nothing beats years of experience."

Mitchell was a co-owner of **Mitchell Auto Parts**. **Eccott** owned his own building supply company and is President of **Dia-Met Minerals**. **Grindlay** owned a number of building supply stores and is an experienced investor. "They had seen it all, heard it all, done it all," says **Byland**. Between them, they could provide practical advice on any problem that arose.

The other trait **Byland** looked for was values similar to those he and his family hold. That meant asking "a lot of question" about prospective advisors. "I wanted good competent business people with the same values and ethics we have," he continues. "I didn't want anybody sleazy. I wanted

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Greenhouse seminar were: Dr. Runia from Naaldwyk, Netherlands; and Dr. McPherson from HIR Stockbridge, England, speaking on the subject of 'pollution solutions'. During the 'sold out' luncheon, an excellent and well received presentation was given by Sally Abbott. This renowned speaker is remembered for her presentation that was truly in the mold of a 'stand up' comic. Her message was, "You don't have to be perfect". It was a great beginning to the show in such a gorgeous setting. A great way to get the show going on the right foot!

The central show area was designed using the combined efforts of horticultural classes from Malispina College in Nanaimo, functions as the show lounge and restaurant. We would also like to give a big thank you to the floral class of Kwantlen College in Langley for making the speaker gift bouquets, the hotel guest room arrangements, and designing all of the shows' decor that appeared around the lobby of the hotel and inside the show itself.

The Can West Booth awards this year went to the following exhibitors:

- Best exhibitor: 'Valleybrook Gardens'
- Most original display: 'Way to Grow'
- Best nursery exhibit: Adera Nursery'
- Best floriculture display: 'Burnaby Lake Greenhouses Ltd.'
- Best suppliers exhibit: 'Innovation'
- Best greenhouse exhibit: 'Prins Greenhouse'
- Best equipment exhibit: 'Friesen Equipment'
- Best small booth exhibit: 'Alouette Nursery'

The winners were presented with a 'Keep-sake' plaque during the Can West Exhibitor's Breakfast Meeting at the Five Sails Restaurant. □

(con't from Page 4, "ADVISORS")

people who had become successful through hard work and innovation. I wanted people who conduct themselves with integrity."

Byland, who has two children, ages 9 and 10, **also** wanted people who understood, "that we are investing **for the** future, that we are a family farm, that our goals are long term." John looked for people who did not need to have a lot of control or profile or a huge stipend. He wanted people who were happy to pass their business management knowledge on. That's not to say advisors shouldn't be recognized and remunerated for the time and effort they expend. They should, says John, who pays his advisors \$200 each per meeting. "They'd do it for free, but I think it's important to acknowledge their contribution."

When **Byland** first took over the nursery, he held meetings once a month. As he grew more sure of himself, meetings were held every second month. Now, they're held every quarter. (**Byland** is free to phone his advisors and bounce ideas off them between meetings.) "Now that I'm older and have surrounded myself with good people, I don't need to confer with council members as often. I only need them for big things." Despite feeling confident about being able to run the business on his own now, **Byland** has no intention of dismantling the council. It's too valuable. Council members offer a "depth of management expertise that's impossible **for one** individual to accumulate." "I don't think a business ever outgrows the need for good business advice," he says. Council members are happy to carry on too, it gives them a chance to keep active in business and share their knowledge. It also gives them the satisfaction of seeing an enterprise they've nurtured flourish.

The Role of an Advisory Council

In addition to functioning as a sounding board, an Advisory Council can offer advice on anything from strategic planning to

production, personnel, or financial management. Advisors can suggest new business opportunities or ways of expanding or diversifying the business. They can suggest new products, production methods or marketing strategies that will improve the farm's profitability. At the same time, advisors can help keep a farmer on track by making sure he doesn't invest so much time and money into the business that core enterprises suffer. They can make sure new land, livestock, equipment or other acquisitions will pay off for themselves in an amount of time.

A council's purpose is not to "rubberstamp" your plans. It's role should be to play the Devil's advocate and point out weaknesses in your plans so you can build contingency plans. Having a team of advisors is very important during the succession era.

An Advisory Council can help choose a successor. Many parents find choosing a successor can be difficult. They're hard pressed to make an objective decision because it's such an emotion-laden task. Asking a third party task force to select a successor helps ensure the best candidate is chosen and reduces the risk of hurt feelings. Advisors can help educate both generations and help mediate differences of opinion. They can mentor a recipe for discord because both parties are handicapped by their old parent/child roles and ways of interacting. They can't relate to each other as independent adults. A **non-family** mentor doesn't have that history to contend with.

An Advisory Council can provide invaluable support and advice if a farmer unexpectedly dies or is incapacitated. It can guide family members through the bewildering maze of decisions they must make. An Advisory Council serves as an "insurance policy" against bereaved, inexperienced, family members making hasty, emotion-clouded decisions that may compromise the security and continuity of the farm.

An Advisory Council can offer cohesiveness and continuity as the torch is passed from one generation to the next. It can help ensure the succeeding generation remains true to the family's original mission or goals and values. □

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Thank you both for your Co-operative effort in this article. • **Editor**

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