

TRAINING FOR WOODLOT LOGGERS

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I will start with a case study: Lets call it:

"THE WOODLOT LOGGING EXPERT"

SITUATION

You accompany your mate, a forestry consultant, to visit one of his woodlot logging jobs on a farmer's property. This consultant specialises in small jobs. In addition to communicating with the farmers he arranges and oversees the logging, cartage and marketing of the produce and paying all parties.

The block you are to visit is about half a hectare of a very large, 40 year old p. radiata. It is mostly flat land with a gentle slope to a small freshwater stream which flows almost entirely around the block.

The proximity of the neighbour's boundary permits access only through or over the stream.

On arrival at the block you walk through a churned up paddock bereft of grass, which is used as a skid and landing. There are several log types scattered around. The landing area is littered with broken strops and wire ropes, machine parts, empty drums, used filters, tools, newspapers and lunch papers. The contractor is in the process of trying to winch and drag a 5 tonne tree out of the stream with a bush rigged D4.

He is on the job alone and his swearing can be heard above the noise of the overworked tractor.

The consultant starts happily chatting to the contractor who ceases work to walk back up the paddock with your mate.

On walking down for a closer look you notice the stream full of felled trees and the heads of extracted ones, a large scarfed tree roped to a small agricultural tractor, stumps with 1m draw wood, "barbers chairs", and clearly incorrect and dangerous felling cuts.

Your consultant mate, having satisfied himself that things are proceeding smoothly, tells you on the walk back to the car - "Boy can that joker get wood onto the ground - cheap too"!

My contribution is on "Training for woodlot loggers". This case study might just as easily be relevant to the

Health and Safety of woodlot loggers, or in this particular case the lack of it.

Some of the questions I might ask you to consider - if I used this case study as a training exercise, are:

1. What responsibilities does the farmer (landowner) have for the operation .
2. What are the responsibilities of the Forestry Consultant.
3. Who is liable in the event of an accident to the operator.
4. What would you do if you were the one visiting the site.
5. What can we do to get a positive result for all parties.

(Answers in my office by next Thursday)

This case study is true. It occurred in 1990. It is likely that self employed contractors are more aware of their responsibilities in 1996. However it is possible that present conditions which exist in the woodlot logging environment still affect performance, safety and quality. Geographic conditions and terrain, isolation, intermittent work, unreal operating costs and cavalier work practices not only encourage continuation of irresponsible attitudes, but insulate the perpetrators from education and training (and prosecution).

It appears to me that there is still a huge gap in work practices and attitude between forest contractors who are working for, and influenced by, forestry corporates, and contractors who secure, produce and in some cases sell wood from small privately owned woodlots.

My opinion is that this gap exists in knowledge about legislation, health and safety and resource management in particular. Value optimisation and log quality information, skills standards, knowledge of how to train people and basic things such as first aid and communication is not always known. Corporates that purchase wood from woodlot contractors are influencing the way this wood is produced, but perhaps, their influence doesn't go far enough.

I want to concentrate on several areas in this paper.

1. Training needs for woodlot crews.
2. Establishing contact and gaining commitment.
3. What we can do to help upskill a mobile and sometimes isolated workforce..

1. Training Needs

FITEC is the Industry Training Organisation (ITO). LFITB is our arms and legs "on the ground".

Under the Industry Training Act it is a FITEC role to

- Set Skill Standards and develop qualifications
- Arrange training delivery and assessment of people after training.
- Monitor and audit training and training standards

We are required to do this for all people employed in our industry and those who are under training with the intention of joining our industry. We think that we have made contact with a large number of people employed in the forestry sector. (There are about 8800 people on the LFITB database). I was recently surprised to learn that there were 184 woodlot contractors working for the principal wood purchasers of the North Island. These contractors employ in excess of 700 people (few of whom are known in our skills recognition system) There are undoubtedly more out there!

Under the Industry Training Act FITEC has a responsibility to get training to this group of contractors and their employers. Whilst this legislation gives legal impetus, recognition that qualifiable training may ultimately result in reduced ACC levies, provides more obvious motivation.

Clearly there are training needs to be met.

The challenge is to ensure that woodlot contractor have access to and the benefits from being associated with structured industry training.

2. Establishing contact and gaining commitment

A policy instrument from the NZ Forest Owners Association had huge impact on its contractor workforce. This statement said "By

1 January 1996 everyone working in the forest would be trained for or under the training for the jobs they were doing". Whilst there was a none-too-subtle take home message contained within, the statement was a catalyst which provided initial impetus to an existing forestry training system. Training is mandatory under the Health and Safety in Employment Act anyway but the FOA kickstart has progressed from one of compulsion to one which is starting to provide real benefits as people gain the satisfaction of being recognised and qualified for their jobs. Simple recognition for work done is a known motivating factor.

The FOA policy (which has recently been refined) will continue to have some influence in the woodlot sector particularly when wood is being purchased by members of NZFOA or those who subscribe to their training policy instrument.

Message #1 Compulsion creates commitment (but such compulsion may not fully extend to our woodlot contracting workforce).

What else drives training?

Recent research in Australia indicates that "Training was widely accepted as part of a solution for enterprises to deal with an increasing competitive environment." The research suggest that as competition increases (in woodlot work.) management is likely to implement training to position themselves more favourably in the competitive environment.

Message #2 Competition is likely to be a driver of training

The same research also indicated that "the search for quality was a driver of training investment". Clearly value optimisation is the bottom line in the commercial forestry business and this will not be achieved without skilled logmakers and a safe effective crew.

Message #3 Quality requirements will be a driver of training

Finally, let's not underestimate the individual in the scheme of things. There are plenty of examples of training success stories in our workforce. Often these result from individual initiative taken by practitioners at the "coal face" (felling face) or committed contractors who create a work and training environment to allow peoples' success to build on success.

Message #4 Workers will always make things better if they're allowed to.

Compulsion, competition, quality and an 'enabling' training system will permit rapid evolution to ensure commitment to improve the skills of the woodlot logging workforce.

There are two final variables which must be considered in this woodlot training equation communication and funding. Communication is a huge issue in the forestry sector. A mobile and dynamic workforce of around 1500 employers, still with unacceptable worker turnover, causes challenges enough.

The fact that forestry companies provide the resource to be worked but wish to distance themselves from "of service" contracts can negatively influence communication. Lack of meaningful contact between contractor and crew also causes problems.

There are many of other examples.

Woodlot owners may not be conversant enough with forestry work practices to communicate job requirements. They may leave things up to the contractor without clear responsibilities being established. This is a further factor which may in turn be compounded by the owner selecting one of those macho colourful contractors with that rough glamour, whose manhood stands on his ability to survive against the odds.

Communication - definitely an issue! (ACC set themselves to commission a research project on communication within forestry around 1990. It was canned but should be reactivated).

3. What can FITEC do to help.

Funding

Subsidies exist through FITEC to allow people in formal structured training schemes to upskill. Woodlot contractors are prime targets for this funding. (It's called the 'off job training' fund and is now an established part of ITO business). This funding stream represents a clear benefit to those belonging to the industry training system. It permits access to training and assessment and the industry FIRS system.

Industry in the broadest sense also must realise that good training costs money. Reward must ultimately exist for those contractors who make financial commitments to getting their workers trained. Premium rates should be paid in return for an expectation of quality. Identifiable components for skill levels and

quality shown in contact rates, may provide some tangible evidence for this, at contract negotiation time.

External funding for training by Government agencies and NZFOA has been a tradition in forestry. Individuals must also be encouraged to take ownership of their training system and financially support their own self development. Paternalism does not rate highly in an environment of user pays and may serve to suppress initiative.

Summary

What then are the threads we need to pull together to provide benefits to those harvesting and purchasing wood from woodlots and small forest blocks?

Compulsion exists through legislation and company policy. Market forces will to some extent drive a **competitive environment** and drive **quality requirements**.

Individuals will make things better (for themselves) if they're allowed to.

Communication is a strategic issue that FITEC is prepared to address and there are some funds available to upskill our contractor workforce.

If our responsible and professional Woodlot contractor takes the positives from these drivers how do we discern him from his less effective peers at contract selection time?

Price? Maybe?

'Before we compare the price how about checking his "Registered Contractors Practicing Certificate"?

Because industry hasn't got one yet!

Why ever not?

Is this a project that FITEC as the ITO should drive?

Your input and contribution to this suggestion would be welcomed.

References

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March 1995

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