

Book Review of WD Farr – Cowboy in the Boardroom by Roy H. Otto

What did you get out of this book?

You have heard me say “It is all about relationships”. The life of WD Farr bears witness to this statement. In fact, I would submit his life is a case book example of what can be accomplished in relationship with others. This legacy of relationship started with his grandfather who gave it to his father who, in turn, gave it to WD. Our own Gerry Horak talks of the power of the coalition of the willing. He also is fond of saying that you can’t make friends when you need them. WD would agree with these statements and his accomplishments would be evidence of these truths. WD was the guiding force of the CBT project but he also spearheaded the Windy Gap Reservoir project as well.

His efforts went beyond water however. He also worked to build the livestock industry. Specifically the cattle industry. He was instrumental in the creation of the American National Cattlemen’s Association and even visited the White House with this organization. He had a voice that people listened to in the industry. He was responsible for establishing standards for the quality of meat. He travel overseas to establish trading relationships with foreign companies.

He also impacted the banking industry knowing how important a strong and stable banking sector was to the success of Agriculture. He served on numerous bank boards. He knew that a stable money supply was necessary not only for Agriculture but also for helping communities grow. Knowing that the smaller banks in Northern Colorado could not compete with larger banks in Denver to meet the needs of this growing region, he took advantage of holding company laws established by the Federal Reserve System to create a 13 bank holding company to meet the region’s capital needs.

Ultimately, in my opinion, WD Farr was a visionary. He was able to see the future. I was amazed at reading his opinions of Russia and China when he toured those countries in the 70s. He basically predicted much of what has become of both countries today. He opined before his death that the current reservoir projects being contemplated in Northern Colorado right now would be the last and he envisioned that a new form of collaboration in the distribution of the supplies generated by these projects would be necessary for ultimate regional success. I think we should listen to a man as visionary as WD Farr.

Would you recommend it to class members?

If you enjoy history and learning about how others can come together to make things better, this book is a great read.

What 3-5 key points would you like to discuss with the class?

Those involved in the provision of water services clearly understand the “GRID LOCK” that is on the horizon. I use the term grid lock because it is a way to describe the ultimate failure of a transportation network. The demand exceeds the supply of road lanes and everything comes to a stop. In the current day to day of the average NOCO resident, he/she is able to feel the impacts of the supply and demand dynamics of transportation. If you are going travel any distance you have to figure in a potential delay due to the failure of the transportation network. It has become a significant enough concern that a coalition of the willing has been able to form to finance improvements along the northern segments of I-25.

In water, however, the NOCO resident does not come face to face with any evidence of the pending grid lock. No NOCO resident wakes up each morning wondering if water is going to come out of their faucet. With no inconvenience it is difficult to get the attention of the community to meet the challenge. In addition, the future water needs issue is really being addressed from the view point of the individual water provider. Yes some have partnered or attempted to partner with other providers to build a new reservoir but they are partnering only to meet their individual needs. Even if all the currently proposed reservoirs are permitted and constructed it is estimated that NOCO will still be facing water supply deficit. Water grid lock is a real issue. I would submit it is the ultimate limiting threat to NOCOs long term economic potential. I would submit it is not an issue that can be solved individually.

Based upon this assumption and the reading of this book, I offer the following questions for the group.

1. If the water supplies of the community you live in are met but your neighbors aren't are you concerned? Would you be concerned that the current water reservoir projects and related water supplies are basically being managed with a zero sum game mindset?
2. WD Farr opined that we would have to manage our water supplies locally, as a region, in the future and that we would have to provide supply based upon volumetric need rather than by what individual farms or communities owned to be successful. Do you agree and if so what would this water supply structure look like?
3. Who or what is the next WD Farr that will provide us with a water supply solution similar to CBT?