

THE AUSTRALIAN COTTON ENTERPRISE NON-TECHNICAL GUIDE FOR NEW ENTRANTS



Disclaimer page

© CQUniversity and the Cotton Research and Development Corporation, 2023

Ownership of intellectual property rights

Unless otherwise noted, copyright (and any other intellectual property rights) in this publication is jointly owned by CQUniversity and the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (referred to as CRDC).

Creative Commons licence

All material in this publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence except content supplied by third parties and logos.

Inquiries about the licence and any use of this document should be emailed to ageducation@cqu.edu.au.

Cataloguing data

This publication (and any material sourced from it) should be attributed as: McDonald, N. & Eady, J. 2024. The Australian cotton non-technical guide for new entrants. The SHIFT Project: Delivering best practice to manage future workforce skills., CQUniversity: Rockhampton. CC BY 4.0

This publication is available at <http://www.shiftproject.com.au>. Agricultural Education and Extension Research Cluster, Institute for Future Farming Systems, CQIRP building 361, CQUniversity, 630 Ibis Avenue, Kawana QLD 4701 Web agri-techeducation.com

Disclaimer

The authors have exercised due care and skill in preparing and compiling the information and data in this publication. Notwithstanding, CQUniversity, its employees and advisers disclaim all liability, including liability for negligence and for any loss, damage, injury, expense or cost incurred by any person as a result of accessing, using or relying on any of the information or data in this publication to the maximum extent permitted by law.

Acknowledgements

The SHIFT Project Team thanks all participants in CRDC-funded workforce research projects, including cotton growers, farm managers, their teams, agronomists, training providers, and fellow researchers, who have made substantial contributions throughout the research project that have informed the development of these resources. We also thank the Cotton Research and Development Corporation, CottonInfo representatives, and Cotton Australia representatives for their ongoing support of The SHIFT Project.

The SHIFT Project is part of the CRDC-Funded project Delivering Best Practice to Manage Future Workforce Skills

Produced by: The SHIFT Project Team
Nicole McDonald (CQUniversity)
Jo Eady (RuralScope)
Chantal Corish (CQUniversity)
Amy Cosby (CQUniversity)
Instructional design: Ruralscope
Graphic design: TS Digital & Design.

Welcome

Hello there

If you have this *Australian Cotton Enterprise Non-Technical Guide For New Entrants* in your hands or on your screen it means you have been given this as part of your welcome to a new job or new workplace. The Australian cotton industry has invested in a project called SHIFT – Our Enterprise Our People. This project involved talking and working with owners, managers, and team leaders to identify how new entrants to cotton enterprises could be given a hand up. This guide is for owners', managers', and team leaders' benefit too as they want to support their team members well. For us this means we want to give you some information to help you settle into your job, team, and workplace quickly and with ease.

What do you mean by non-technical?

When you work on a cotton farm you will learn technical skills such as machinery operation, chemical handling, and irrigation. You need these skills to be a good contributing member of your team. You also need to learn non-technical skills like self-management, communication, and resilience to work effectively and achieve good outcomes for yourself and the team.

Non-technical skills can be learned and developed.

This short guide will give you some non-technical insights and tips that are helpful as you settle into your new job and workplace. We understand that starting a new job or joining a new workplace can be exciting, challenging, rewarding, demanding, and at times a little daunting. Regardless of how you feel right now, we have written this guide especially for you. We are Nicole McDonald (researcher) and Jo Eady (facilitator) and together we form a part of the SHIFT team. We are committed to continuous improvement, through a focus on non technical skills, on Australian cotton farms. We are the listeners in cotton farm conversations, the developers of models and words to help explain non technical work stuff and the pair who keeps it real. Well, we try to at least, 'cos between you and us we know some of this non technical stuff can be pretty tricky to get your head around.

Today, we want to give you some insights, tips, and some new knowledge. And maybe a pinch of confidence too.

So read on.....

With best wishes

Nicole and Jo

Nicole McDonald and Jo Eady

Before we begin....let's get your mindset in the right space

If you've played sport before, you might have heard a coach tell you "You need to get your head in the game", and showing up to work is no different. We need you to take a moment to think about your mindset. This influences how you show up and the attitude you bring to your work. It can be the difference between getting stuck in negative emotions when you experience something challenging, or seeing it as an opportunity to grow and develop. We asked cotton growers what are some of the traits or mindsets that they need new entrants to bring to their work, and these are our top three.

Integrity

At its core, integrity is "I say what I mean, and I do what I say I will". Your actions match your words, and your words are honest. Having integrity means owning up to any mistakes you may make – and trust us, everyone makes mistakes when they work on a farm. Think about the kind of person you want to be and make choices about your behaviour that moves you closer to that vision. Think courageous honesty here. Are you open and honest with yourself and with others?

Curiosity

Curiosity is a super power when it comes to building relationships at work, and learning to do your work in a team. Curiosity stops you judging a person or situation and allows you to stay open to getting more information that will help you figure out how to get better results. Can you suspend your gut reaction and ask some questions first? "Why" and "how" are some of the best types of questions to ask. If in doubt "can you tell me more about _____" is a great way to open up the conversation.

Humility

Some of the best and most experienced cotton growers we have met use the trait of humility to stay open to getting feedback. This helps the best to stay the best, and keep adapting in their work. You may come to this new job with some experience, but can you stay modest in your expertise? Can you stay open to learning many different ways to do a task? You just might find an even better way to do your work.

These three traits: integrity, curiosity, and humility are some of the building blocks of good leadership. Show up to work with these in your toolkit and you'll be well on your way to establishing yourself as a valuable team member.

Set yourself up for success in your job and workplace

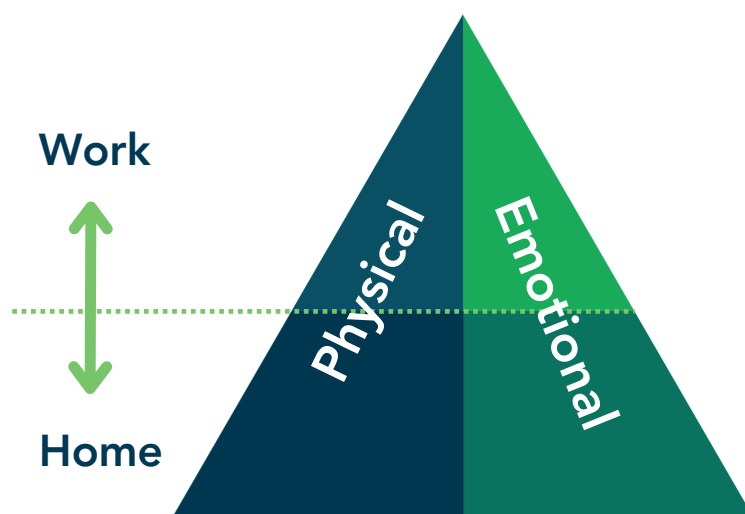
We want to start with an introduction to non-technical skills for you by focusing on self-management. Every manager or supervisor we've interviewed wants their team members to get to a stage where they can be trusted to manage themselves and their work. These two skills go hand in hand. Setting yourself and others up for success in the workplace is a non-technical skill. And non-technical skills like this really do make a difference in the way team members go about their work.

What does managing yourself mean?

Understanding and managing yourself physically and emotionally is about being responsible for;

- How you show up in your team / workplace everyday
- Your physical wellbeing and how this impacts you and those around you
- Your emotional wellbeing and how this impacts you and those around you
- Activities outside of worktime and beyond your workplace that might affect your ability to do your job
- How you manage your time
- How you relate to others

We've found that actions are needed at work and at home. Both your work life and home life can affect your job performance. We call this spillover, because what happens at work can spillover into how you show up at home, and what happens at home can spillover into how you show up at work. Managing yourself physically and emotionally to be a good team member means you need to take action in both areas of your life. This model shows the spillover.



Set yourself up for success in your job and workplace

Here's some tips for how to manage yourself. They're a combination of work and home or more personal things you can focus on. I know, we hear you, reading about this personal stuff might not be what you expected or even want to read, but we are sharing it here as we know it can truly make a difference as you settle into your new job and workplace. We know too that some of this stuff won't be new and some will be, so we encourage you to spend time working on the stuff that's new while continuing to develop what you already know or are aware of.

1. Set up your own personal routines
2. Ensure healthy habits
3. Develop positive ways of talking to yourself
4. Be the best version of yourself and not someone else
5. Become clear about daily, weekly and monthly type tasks
6. Create a day / week plan
7. Be the best at your job you can be
8. Give yourself permission to not get everything right from the start

When you can do these things, you are managing how you show up to work and how you contribute to your workplace, you become a resilient, capable, trusted and valued team member.

Let's take a closer look at these.

1. Set Up Your Own Personal Routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wake at the same time everyday• Sleep 8 hours every night you can• Set up an exercise routine• Be on time or early• Manage your hygiene for your own and the benefit of others
2. Keep healthy habits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give yourself time to get ready for work – physically and emotionally• Eat well• Drink lots of water and bring a large and full drink bottle to work• Make good choices about alcohol consumption• Maintain optimistic thinking, especially when things don't go to plan• Connect regularly with those you care about• Build fun into your day

Set yourself up for success in your job and workplace

3. Develop positive ways of talking to yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak positively to yourself, especially when things don't go to plan • Tell yourself when you've done a good job and why. This is really important when you find yourself working alone as it helps to keep motivation levels up • Identify 3 things that have gone well at the end of each day. On some days, especially when things haven't gone well eg breakdowns, weather interruptions etc these may be difficult to find. Find them anyway. • Set yourself a positive mindset for the day. This means setting yourself a positive intention at the start of the day. • Identify how to do things differently when they don't go to plan so that you will be set for the next time you complete the same task / job
4. Be the best version of yourself and not someone else	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be yourself – know who you want to be and take note of what actions take you closer or further away from this • Know your strengths and play to these • Identify role models and adopt what you like about who they are and how they do things • Be authentic and consistent in how you show up • Tell the truth and own your actions
5. Become clear about daily, weekly and monthly tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up lists for daily tasks – phone or paper list • Set up a list for weekly tasks – phone or paper list • Set up a list for monthly tasks – phone or paper list • Set up days, dates and times for job tasks where possible • Consider creating checklists
6. Create a day / week plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a day timetable for yourself so that you know what time you start work, take breaks and finish work • Identify what days you will do what and set them in place by writing them into your phone or on a whiteboard • Use the plans as checklists so that you tick them off when you complete tasks • Review your week plans and make adjustments when necessary due to changes, such as weather

Set yourself up for success in your job and workplace

7. Put in the effort - be the best at your job that you can be	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on what works well• Learn from what works well• Build on what works well• Transfer knowledge and skills from one task / job to another with confidence• Tell yourself when things go well and give yourself a pat on the back, this is especially important when you're working on your own• Identify something you want to learn more about and seek out a way to do this – eg. Look for information, ask someone for guidance etc• Drop the comparisons to other people, your goal is to get better from what you were able to do the day before, not by comparing yourself to someone else
8. Give yourself permission to not get everything right from the start	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be kind to yourself – ask yourself what would you say to a friend that made a mistake. And then speak to yourself this way• Set yourself realistic expectations• Ask for help when you need it

“It’s got nothing to do with (technical) skills level. Those people that want to be clean and tidy are clean and tidy with the way they want work done. They’re organised.

I want people to get to the stage where I can say ‘You take the reins and I’m happy for you to create your own job list so I can see your completed tasks.’

- Nathaniel Phillis, Cotton Grower

Shake the shame

We want to share with you some information about learning about your new workplace and new job and tasks you will do. This is especially important if you have never worked on a cotton farm or in agriculture before.

Some people who come to work on cotton farms have had no experience in the cotton industry or the broader agricultural industry. In fact, you may have never set foot on a farm before. This means you will likely lack familiarity with farming workplaces and the technical and non-technical skills that are needed. If this is you then please read through this information carefully, and even if this isn't you, please read through this information carefully.

Adjusting and settling into a new job and workplace is important. We want to help you do this so you feel comfortable and safe. The learning curve can be steep, making mistakes will happen, and your resilience may be tested in ways it hasn't been in the past.

Add to this, cotton farm work environments can be very different to workplaces that you have had the opportunity to experience in the past. While it's likely there is a strong team element on farm, you may work in places physically removed from others and be left with your own thoughts. Working in this place creates room for you to feel uncertain about your task and job performance, it could see you unsure of your role and less connected to the team (or to a support network in the community). This means you are left to "fill in the blanks" with your own stories of how you are going and whether you are good enough. And sometimes this can be more negative than positive.

It's likely you will require support to understand the way a cotton farm works as well as your role in it. Please reach out to your team leader for support or a more experienced team member.

Shake the shame

What's shame?

When we talk to owners, team leaders and members they talk to us about how when they are new or new to a task, they can feel off. They place expectations on themselves to know things or to be able to do things that aren't consistent with where they are at. This can result in feeling shame. Shame is a natural emotion found in each of us. Here are a few examples of how shame can show up and what it might look and feel like to you;

- Shame is hiding the fact that I don't know how to do something when everyone else in the team does
- Shame is me getting angry or crying in front of my team mates
- Shame is sharing that I don't know where my Mum is when I know she's in jail
- Shame is hearing my boss say I'm stupid as I filled the diesel vehicle up with unleaded petrol
- Shame is not getting a question right when asked by my boss
- Shame is me telling myself that the reason my team leader doesn't want to hang out after work is because they don't like me (not because the team leader is setting work/home life boundaries for their own wellbeing).

Why are we telling you about shame?

The role you undertake and how well you do it is linked to how you feel about yourself. Everyone wants a workplace where everyone feels great and does their best each and every time. Shame exists when you don't feel great and you feel off about what you are doing, you lose confidence and can even think there is something wrong with who you are. When this happens, you might even find you question if your team, team leader or workplace is the right fit.

If you have any feelings like this at all, we encourage you to chat with your team leader and let them know you're not feeling great about how you are going in your job or new workplace. And you know what? When you open up to others about how you are going and feeling in your team or with your team leader, we really hope you will hear them say things like;

- I know that feeling and it sucks
- Me too
- You're not alone with this, many people feel like this first time around I've been where you are and it can be really hard
- I think a lot of us experience that. It's not just you. I understand what this is like, I've felt like that too

What's really important here is that you share how things are working or not working for you and how you are travelling.

Four ways to build resilience

Given that shame is an emotion that lives in most of us, it makes sense to spend some time here on how to build resilience and move through any shame you may experience. This is what shame resilience looks like in the words of a 23-year-old Farm Hand from the Riverina. He shares how he responds when making a mistake at work.

"I think the easiest thing to do is when it happens put your hands up and say it's happened then go about finding the best solution to fix the problem. The big thing is just learning from that mistake. You can't learn unless you make a mistake somewhere. Working on the farm in general there is always going to be a mistake, or there is always going to be issues that arise. But as long as I am able to admit that I have made a mistake or that I am wrong that's probably the biggest thing I think. You can always move forward, but if you beat around the bush and try to cover it up or try to pretend it hasn't happened, you are going to have more dramas in the long run."

– Farm Hand, Southern Valleys

Here are 4 key ways to build resilience according to the work of researcher, Brené Brown. Each of these four ways are required to build shame resilience but not always in this order. See the double headed arrows? This means you can go backwards and forwards as you move through the four ways.



Sutton, J. (2017) Shame Resilience Theory: Advice from Brené Brown. Retrieved from <https://positivepsychology.com/shame-resilience-theory/>

Four ways to build resilience

When you take ownership of building your shame resilience you will improve your ability to take accountability for errors and identify the learning opportunities in mistakes. The trick here is not to keep things to yourself when you don't feel good about the task or how things are going for you in the team. When you don't feel great, reach out. Having a conversation about how you are travelling can really make a lot of difference to how you show up, go about your tasks and participate as part of the team.

"All we know is the experiences that we've had. And what we've seen in the past of working and not working.

It's about knowing who to ring and getting to a point where you're comfortable with yourself to acknowledge that you don't actually know. Knowing that you need to ring someone or talk to someone else to bounce ideas with and come up with that 50/50 shot.

And I think that's a case of getting comfortable in your own skin and in your own role."

- Emma Ayliffe, Farmer and Agronomist

Are you ready to receive feedback?

In a perfect world, you'd be your best self every day, make no mistakes, and get everything right the first time you try it and every time you do it. You'd be certain in your actions. Your good intentions would be enough to get the outcome you want. And what you want would be the same as what everyone wants at work. Sorry to burst the bubble here, but this is not reality.

In reality, we are all a work in progress. The upside of this is that you grow and develop your technical and non-technical skills through the experiences you have and the learning you do. One of the most powerful ways to learn is by receiving feedback. Being able to receive feedback is an essential part of any work role. Feedback is really useful for learning and growth.

This is what learning and feedback looks like in the words of a Farm Hand from the MacIntyre Valley.

"The first thing I really had to become more skilled about was operating heavy machinery. In some cases, it's half a million dollars worth of tractor that you are in control of, so you really don't want to wreck it. The learning is ongoing, and it's just through various talks with (the grower) and a lot of the time it's through mistakes that I have made."

– Farm Hand, MacIntyre Valley

At work, you are given the opportunity to learn from your team leader and your teammates through feedback. Farms can be high pressure work environments and sometimes constructive feedback given in these moments may be delivered in direct ways that can at times feel harsh or even hurtful. Even in more quiet times, it can be hard to hear constructive comments about your actions and difficult to not take these personally. You may have an emotional reaction as these comments lead you to feel shame, disappointment, or be misunderstood. Please ensure that these emotional reactions don't stop you from hearing or taking on the feedback, as this is the way you learn and grow.

Are you ready to receive feedback?

The Growth Oriented Feedback Circle

We've developed a growth oriented feedback circle for you. It outlines the mindset, source, and actions needed to greet and gain feedback. These three elements will help you to manage your emotions, and receive feedback that is actionable and leads to improvement.



Receiving feedback on farm

Here are some tips in more detail to help you move through your reactions and take control of gaining feedback, so you find the opportunity to learn, change, and improve your job performance.

Step 1: Mindset - practise the skill of optimism in how you experience feedback

Think about when your team mate or team leader might be having a few words with you at the end of the day about something you need to stop doing, start doing, or change in how you do your work. How does this sometimes make you feel? If you're someone who has experienced a lot of criticism in your lifetime, when a team mate or team leader starts to talk to you about a mistake you've made at work, you may hear a little nagging voice inside saying to you "I'm not good enough"

Are you ready to receive feedback?

"I knew I couldn't do this right", "It's too hard and I give up". This is when we need to train ourselves in the skill of optimism. Optimism helps us to hear constructive feedback and stop these negative self-beliefs and thoughts from getting in the way of us learning from our mistakes and improving in our work. There are 3 things optimists say to themselves when hearing feedback that helps them to stop feeling it as criticism and start hearing it as constructive feedback:

This is not permanent

- What has happened in the past, doesn't define what will happen in the future.
- It's what I do next that matters.
- Adapt and keep going.

This is not pervasive

- My mistakes, errors, or poor judgements in this situation are not my whole contribution to this workplace.
- This was a bad moment or activity, but I can learn and improve from this.
- I can, do, and will make positive contributions to the team.

This is not personal

- I am not my mistakes.
- Feedback of my actions is not feedback of me as a person.
- My team mates want me to improve.
- Their feedback doesn't mean they don't like me or don't want me here.
- Their intention is to support me.

Step 2: Source - find the right person to ask for feedback

So now you're open to getting feedback, it's time to go out and ask everyone for their thoughts on your job performance, right? No, no, no - wrong. Have you ever heard the phrase "too many cooks spoil the broth"? The type of feedback you get will vary depending on who you ask. Too many opinions on your job performance may make it difficult for you to get the right feedback you need. Some people may even keep asking around for feedback simply to get to the feedback that they want to reinforce their behaviour, not the critical feedback that will help them learn. Seek out a teammate who has developed their expertise in the task or skill you are wanting to improve. If in doubt, the farm manager or grower will know who you should be looking to for feedback, whether that's them or another team member.

Are you ready to receive feedback?

Step 3: Action - proactively ask for advice and other suggestions

Do you know what is better than asking for feedback on your past performance? Asking others for advice on what they would do to get a better result in the future. Feedback that is vague and does not give you specific actions to guide your improvement is not useful. You can get better feedback by asking for advice and suggestions to improve your performance. For example, if someone tells you, "You need to make sure you're paying attention and don't drive the machinery into a channel next time" don't leave it there. Ask them,

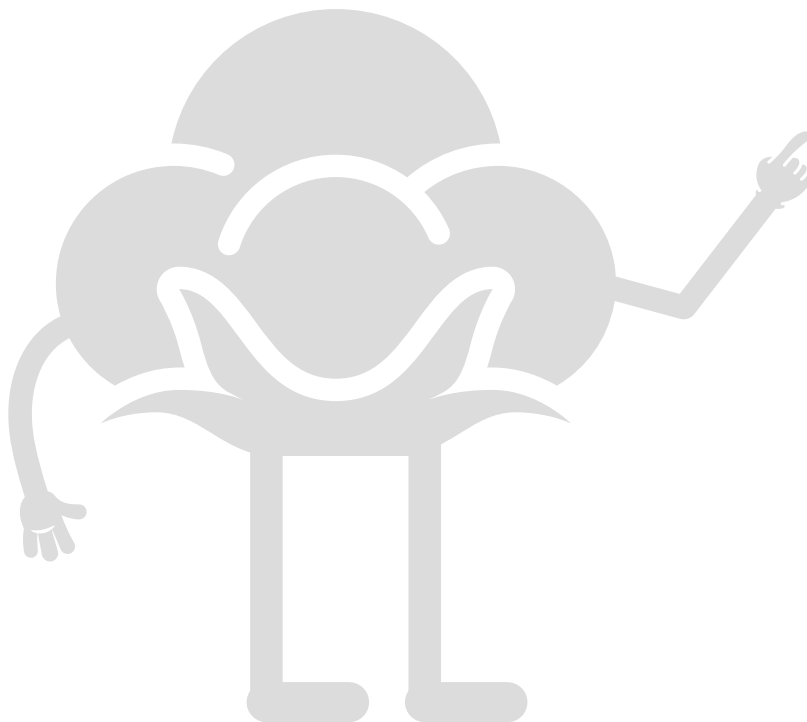
"What do you do to stop your attention wandering and stay alert while on the machinery?

Do you have any advice for me on what to look out for?"

Asking for advice and suggestions helps you to get the information you need to improve your job performance.

Over to you

Being ready and able to hear and accept feedback is an important skill to have when taking up a new job and working in a new workplace.



You belong here - information for you about your community and industry

Community

We know that feeling a sense of belonging is really important. This is about continuing or developing hobbies or interests beyond your job and workplace. These hobbies or interests are things you can do alone, with a friend or colleague or with people you don't know yet. Check out your new community. Ask others about what hobbies and interests they have and what's available in the community you've joined. Book club? Tennis, cricket, footy, netball or chess? Perhaps a walking group. Seek out what interests you most and join if it's of interest.

Industry

There are lots of organisations that support the Australian cotton industry. The industry has groups that support enterprises and workers. These are also open to new entrants to get involved with.

Cotton Grower Associations

Each of the cotton growing regions or valleys has a cotton grower association – these are referred to as CGAs. You will find a list of them all, including the one closest to you here. <https://cottonaustralia.com.au/cotton-grower-association> Each association has contact details.

Cotton Australia

Cotton Australia is the peak industry body for cotton growers and the Australian cotton Industry. It's often referred to as CA. <https://cottonaustralia.com.au/>

Follow the Cotton Australia Facebook page here
<https://www.facebook.com/CottonAustralia>

You can read more about the cotton industry here.
<https://cottonaustralia.com.au/industry-overview>

CottonInfo

CottonInfo is the Australian cotton industry's joint extension program. CottonInfo is designed to connect growers with research, bringing growers, consultants, and agronomists – the latest news, information, events and research.

You belong here - information for you about your community and industry

Check out the CottonInfo website here <https://www.cottoninfo.com.au/> It houses a wealth of information about growing cotton and you can subscribe to the free weekly E-News there that is really worthwhile and keeps you up to the minute about what's happening across the cotton industry

Follow the CottonInfo Facebook page here <https://www.facebook.com/CottonInfoAust>

Cotton Research and Development Corporation

The Cotton Research and Development Corporation, referred to as the CRDC delivers outcomes in cotton research, development and extension (RD&E) for the Australian cotton industry. A partnership between the Commonwealth Government and cotton growers, CRDC exists to invest in world-leading RD&E to benefit Australia's dynamic cotton industry, and the wider community.

You can read more about the Cotton Research and Development Corporation here <https://www.crdc.com.au/>

They also share a lot of free information at <https://www.insidecotton.com/> And you can also read many of their latest publications there.

The Spotlight magazine is an industry staple – it's a monthly publication and is offered free through subscription. You can find more information and subscribe here. <https://www.crdc.com.au/publications/spotlight-magazine>

The SHIFT Project

SHIFT is an Australian cotton industry funded project about increasing workforce effectiveness. Check out the SHIFT website for information about non – technical skills. <https://shiftproject.com.au/>

There is also a SHIFT Facebook page that you can follow for regular updates to assist you develop your non technical skills. Give it a like and follow. <https://www.facebook.com/SHIFTagriculture>

Over and out for now

Congratulations!

Thanks so much for taking the time to read through this guide. We know we have shared a lot of information with you about non technical skills and how you can develop them further.

We hope you have enjoyed the read and that it has given you some insights, tips and tools for you to carry into your new job and workplace. We also hope you have enjoyed checking out some of the websites and resources we suggested.

Now, there's one more thing. Before you leave this guide, please take time to reflect on the information we've shared with you.

Please ask yourself the following questions....

1. What topic has stuck out as being the most important for you right now?
2. What section of the guide do you think you need to re-read to really understand it fully?
3. What are the 2,3,4 or 5 things you are going to action or put in place straight away from reading this guide? What are some things you will do at work? What are some things you will do at home?
4. Is there a topic that you would like to talk to someone about? Who will you talk to and when will you talk to them about it?
5. What are you going to do right now to ensure you have learned the most from this guide?

And finally we wish you well.....

Please take care, refer to this guide again and reach out to others in your team to speak to about your job and your workplace so that you settle in quickly and with ease.

With best wishes

Nicole and Jo

Nicole McDonald and Jo Eady