

## What mindsets hold executives back?

Networking Event, 10 September, 2009

*Organisational ego, the impostor syndrome, praise culture, non-transparent politics, and authentic conversations* were all hot topics at a HR and Learning and Development panel discussion presented by The People Development Group, Ernst & Young and three of Australia's leading HR and L&D professionals.

The panel of experts shared with their fellow professionals their insights on "*What Mindsets hold executives back?*" – each panelist with a different story on mindset challenges organisations faced and solutions they were implementing.

The audience members then shared and compared their experiences.

**Helen Jackson** (Ernst & Young's Director of Organisational Development and Learning Oceania) stressed that shifting *individual* mindsets is vital to Ernst & Young – shifting a "sole trader" personal mindset to a business mindset of collaboration with clients to co-develop business solutions.



Helen shared how coaching has been a focus over the past 18 months to shift mindsets. Key influencers in the business need to take an interest and invest time to coach individuals - creating a *praise culture* and a *virtuous cycle*. This positive environment helps individuals be more predisposed to the messaging.

"From neural science, to shift a person's mindset, for them to learn new behaviours, it requires them to make new neural connections in their brain. The brain learns fastest if new experiences are positive. A praise culture has a biological effect – it causes the brain to secrete dopamine which actually is pleasurable."

Ernst & Young is investing in three key programs –

1. Authentic Conversations
2. Strengthening Inner Dialogue, and
3. Strengthening the Business Mindset.

**Elizabeth Lovell** (National HR Mgr Finance & IT - Westfield) highlighted three key areas that affect mindset –

- Ego
- Politics, and
- Leaders leaving unsaid what needs to be said.



### Ego

On Ego, Elizabeth said that personal ego of individuals, while having short-term success and impact, ultimately didn't work long-term as team members see through personal needs and agendas.

Elizabeth drew an important distinction between *individual ego* (ultimately negative) and *organisational ego* (*positive*).

"We promote organisational ego. We want people to be appropriately proud and passionate about

Westfield. So we have a lot of people who do have an ego – but it's about the family, it's about the way we work.”

### Politics

“People play politics. Politics is real; politics can often be very useful and successful in the short-term, but what we've found, and what we're building a culture with absolutely zero tolerance around, is *non-transparent politics*. So let's absolutely promote people building coalitions, influencing – but let's do that in an open way. Don't do it behind closed doors. Don't do it in a way that undermines people.

The way we do that, is we set up across different divisions and regions, governance forums that bring relevant people to the table. We facilitate those discussions in an open way.”

### When leaders have the mindset of leaving things unsaid that should be said

With the tough labor market, leaders need to have real career discussions with people. Leaders need to have real discussions with people about career moves - “what's it going to take and do you have the qualities needed?”

Elizabeth then shared how Westfield deals with ineffective mindsets – it combines business with HR, combine governance structures, sets up PMO framework and links leadership models to those. Personality awareness is important with the leadership development.

**Shelley Hudson** (General Manager Leadership Development & Performance CBA)

For Shelley, it's important that organisations get mindset right at three levels –

- The organisational mindset through a leadership framework
- The mindset within teams



- The mindset of individuals – unique and separate from the organisational mindset

A crucial factor in mindsets throughout an organisation, especially at the leadership level, is the confidence leaders do or don't exhibit.

“A prevalent trend in confidence leadership in all organisations is what we call *the impostor syndrome*. They're really worried about being exposed, not doing the thing that they're doing really well – someone coming up and tapping them on the shoulder saying ‘are you really at the level that we are paying you at?’ You've got to be true to yourself. You've got to be who you are and that comes with all the good and the bad.

We do a lot of self-understanding in leadership style and the more that you can operate with your own SWOT analysis – Strengths and Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats – the more you can focus on development of yourself.”

After the three panelists shared their views, members of the audience volunteered their experiences and observations.

A common theme was the need to have real and authentic conversations rather than leaving important things unsaid.

Professionals in the audience and the panel discussed the importance of metrics and measurement of manager quality. One solution discussed included *pulse check surveys* and having more detailed and vigorous measurement of important conversations – not just whether conversations took place, but the also the level of satisfaction on the quality of the conversation.

The event is more an interactive conversation kicked off by panelists, rather than a one-way presentation. The topic of the next industry discussion will be a natural flow-on from the mindset topic and certain to generate plenty of interest – a deeper exploration into *Authentic Conversations*.

## Image Gallery



Christopher Whitnall, PDG, Helen Jackson, Ernst & Young, Elizabeth Lovell, Westfield and Shelley Hudson, CBA



Mindy Mackenzie, Campbell Arnotts and Christopher Whitnall, PDG



Patrick Medd and Marie-Edith Dugoujon, Ernst & Young



Helen Jackson, Ernst & Young, Paul Diaz and Maria Requin, QBE



Mike Hamer, Madston Black, Cate Hathway, Boral, Evelyn McDonnell, Ernst & Young and Amanda Sheard, Madston Black



Rosalie Katsinas and Tayn Pavelic, talkforce and Jacqui Laing, PDG