



# THE LEADERSHIP CONTEXT

## Finding the Next Set of Directors

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## Background

Beverage company Maxxium realised it had no 'funnel' of up and coming talent that could be groomed for future leadership. And, as one of the key players in the highly competitive FMCG industry, the company identified this as a weakness in its strategic planning. Without a good retention and talent development programme, the alternative was to lose good people and the company knew this would not only be costly, but risky, especially if those people ended up in the employ of a competitor.

The company set out to develop a Leadership Programme. Through an internal process, about twenty five high-performers were selected from across all areas of the business in Australia and New Zealand. A decision was made to invest in this group over an eighteen month period, providing them with foundation skills that would unleash their potential and develop them as future leaders.

## The Challenge

The Leadership Programme itself – the brainchild of Organisational Development Director, Simon Youngs – was developed through various discussions about what the business needed. It's objectives included:

- Develop strategic & creative thinking
- Decentralise decision-making
- Develop EQ - individual motivators and drivers
- Enrich jobs for more self-actualisation
- Drive and challenge the performance of our High Potential Talent
- Strengthen the business' succession pool
- Bridge the gap between the executive and senior management
- Meet the needs of our top talent in the new business environment
- Engage people on an individual level - a compass, not a road map
- Increase sales and profit

*"A 'one-size-fits-all' approach was not going to work so the team devised a blended learning model, underpinned with executive coaching"*



## Our Approach

Youngs and his in-house team realised that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach was not going to work. They devised their own blended learning model, choosing blended learning because it was the best way to deliver the content they wanted to include in the program and also out of respect for people's differing learning styles.

"We were making a significant investment," says Simon Youngs. "We wanted to give people the best opportunity to get a really positive outcome."

The final curriculum consisted of a combination of MBA-level formal workshops on various subjects, action learning, and set tasks including group and individual projects. Projects weren't fictional either, they were concepts that the business wanted to research or to implement and they were given to the program participants for refinement and development. Finally, Youngs chose to underpin all of this learning with executive coaching.

Youngs, who questions the real value that most organisations see from traditional training, whereby people attend a two-day seminar and, "...often come back with little more than a massive binder full of neatly typed notes that will sit on their desk for ever more," accredits the executive coaching element as one of the program's critical successes. "This is what bought all the other learning together," he says.

"The other benefit," he explains, "is that the coaching addressed a range of issues and not just the problems people were asked to solve throughout the duration of the program, but other things such as their preferred working style, their leadership qualities, and so on.... Coaching is personalised so while nobody takes away 100% when they go off to a workshop for a day, with coaching they do take in 100% because it's all relevant." Youngs chose \*Praesta Executive Coaching (Australia) to work with his people. (now called the edge partnership)

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***Simon Youngs Global Head of Talent***



"The coaching team was absolutely right for this project because they're not all psychologists – they come from varied business backgrounds and that's what we needed. We needed to give our people the opportunity to expose themselves to other schools of thought and other ways of doing things."

Leadership Programme participant George Patterson, New Zealand Supply Chain Manager, initially approached the coaching with trepidation. "I wasn't going to use it, but at the end of the formal leadership programme there were some things I still wanted to focus on in terms of my own style, to make sure I was developing into the kind of leader I wanted to be," he says.

Regular coaching sessions enabled Patterson to view his behaviour differently. "I am a great reader," he says. "But so much of what you read is generalised and theoretical and doesn't necessarily help when you need to apply it to real problems. Coaching, on the other hand, is grounded in reality."

Patterson says he left each session clutching a list of things to do which appealed to his need to have practical solutions. "This made me feel like I was making real progress and not just talking about progress," he says. He cites the relationship with his line manager as an example of how coaching helped him to achieve the positive result he wanted.

"My manager and I are very different and sometimes that impacted on how we communicated with each other and worked together. I wanted to improve our relationship. Coaching helped me find a new approach and I never actually realised how much the sessions were helping me until I look back now."

Another of the Leadership Program participants, Bevan Adin had a similar experience. "I didn't think that I would use the coaching either. It was only when I was offered an overseas posting that I thought it might be helpful," he says.

While Adin thought a coach could assist him to make the transition to another country, role and lifestyle and cope with the associated pressures of relocating with a young family, he realised very quickly that the coaching was providing much more.

*"We wanted to be about long term development, not a 'sheep dip'," says Youngs. "And we've achieved that.*

"I knew that the new role would be different for me and while the structured learning of the Leadership Program had given me some tools for 'leading a team' as opposed



to being 'someone with authority', the coaching really helped me to pull apart my own behaviour... to look at what was good and where I could improve."

This was enormously beneficial for Adin who learned on his arrival to New Zealand that his new job had far more challenges than anticipated. "Basically, I needed to restructure the department quickly to deal with a lot of the day-to-day issue. My coach would make sure that I didn't sit on the fence too long. He helped me to prioritise the issues and deal with what needed to be done."

For Adin's team, the benefits of his experience on the Leadership Program have been in the area of culture and morale. The company conducted a climate survey shortly before his arrival in New Zealand two years ago and his team scored below average. Several months later another climate survey was completed and despite a restructure and many changes under Adin, his team scored the highest culture satisfaction result in the country.

Youngs believes that Adin and Patterson are both classic examples of employees who were able to reach the 'next level' of their performance through the Leadership Program and in particular, through the executive coaching.

Both agree. For Patterson, coaching enabled him to remain results-orientated and solution-focused but has given him the tools to approach those outcomes differently. "Coaching shifted my thinking so now I am more focused on how we get there - the process - and I let the results fall out of that," he says.

Adin says, "I think that the longevity of the program also helped me. Because the learning was over an extended period and was part of the working day, dealing with real issues with my colleagues, it became embedded into me."

"We wanted the program to be about long-term development, not a 'sheep dip'," says Youngs. "And we achieved that. We have a group of people across our business who are ready to take on the next challenge."

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But the program is not available to everyone, equally. "We simply couldn't afford it," admits Simon Youngs, "And it is not necessarily good business sense anyway. What we are saying to our people is that the opportunity exists for everyone. We will support talent and we will invest in talent, but our people need to demonstrate their abilities and show us that they are deserving of the investment."

One positive result, according to Youngs, has been a clear impact upon retention across the pool of rising young stars. All, except one of the original Leadership Program participants are still with the company, five years on – most of them in different, more senior roles. In the case of the sole employee who left, he discovered through the program that his dreams lay elsewhere, outside the beverage industry. "And we understood that," says Youngs. "Certainly exposing people to new and interesting thought processes can be a risk, especially if they have spent many years not knowing where they want to be career-wise, but for us the risk has been minimal. People are thriving and the trickle down effect of having good leaders has meant we are a happier place to work overall."

## Measurement

The company's investment in the Leadership Program was not insignificant, equating to about \$16,000 per person. Although the Maxxium Board was realistic about the fact that this was a long-term investment, it still had to be satisfied that the program would, eventually, deliver to the bottom line.

When it came to presenting program outcomes, Youngs asked the individual program participants to demonstrate how they had started to, or intended to, ensure they repaid the business for the investment made in them, and their careers.

*"I will never underestimate the way that coaching supported me to do great things – things I didn't even know that I was capable of."*

**Bevan Adin, NZ GM**



"Some individuals were actually able to say to the Board that they had changed X and saved \$Y. Others were able to demonstrate a happier, more productive team, or a better, more effective system. For others it was more about their own way of operating and the improvements they could see in their interactions with others," says Youngs.

George Patterson says: "I count myself very lucky. This is perhaps the single biggest investment that Maxxium has made in people globally. To be part of it has been a privilege and I don't underestimate what I've learned."

For Adin, "the exposure I've had to the Senior Executive Team and Board through the program has been invaluable. I can see exactly where I fit in this company and where it might take me in the future."

Maxxium is currently looking to roll the Leadership Program out globally.

## Client Feedback

*"What made Padraig's team so right for this job is that the Executive Coaches are not all psychologists – they come from diverse backgrounds – and that's really what we needed. We needed to give our people the opportunity to expose themselves to other schools of thought and other ways of doing things."*

**Simon Youngs, Global Talent Lead**

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**Bevan Adin, Manager – Finance & Business Development, Maxxium (New Zealand)**





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