

Eight ways to reinvigorate your leadership

How Australia's top
businesspeople
stay inspired



A FRESH YEAR, A FRESH START

Something about the calendar flipping over from December to January makes us feel that we can reach new goals, change our habits, and revive old dreams.

The best leaders take that spark of optimism and fan it into flames using a range of energising activities or sources of creative inspiration. We know this because, at *LeadingCompany*, we speak to inspiring leaders all the time. In this ebook, we share with you their generous insights, the fonts of their ideas, and the well-spring of their energy, condensed into a snappy read that is designed to give you a new year's boost.

You'll hear from leaders such as Carol Schwartz (Stockland), Elizabeth Proust (Perpetual Trustees), Richard Goyder (Wesfarmers), Gavin Slater (National Australia Bank), Greg Ellis (Realestate.com.au) and Miles George (Infigen) as well as marketing smarties, such as Randi Zuckerberg (Mark's older sister).

Before you plunge into another challenging year, take a moment to compare your ideas against the ideas of some of our top business leaders.

Here's to renewal.

KATH WALTERS
EDITOR, *LEADINGCOMPANY*

1.

START MENTORING

Surprisingly perhaps, attending to others' problems can be a great source of inspiration.

Many leaders had mentors who helped them get to where they are today. For this reason, they often choose to pass on the wisdom and expertise they have gained over the years to a younger generation of leaders.

But mentoring isn't a one-way relationship.

Carol Schwartz is a non-executive director at property development company, Stockland, and a strong supporter of mentoring.

Asked why she spends her time helping others advance their careers, she says she gains a lot from meeting new people.

"It broadens my thinking and exposes me to new things and new ways of seeing things," she says. "It's incredibly symbiotic."

2.

DO YOUR STAFF HAVE ANY GOOD IDEAS?

You might be the leader, but you don't have to come up with all the innovation and good ideas yourself. In fact, the best leaders tap the collective brains of their staff and even customers and suppliers.

At wind and solar energy company Infigen, CEO Miles George has initiated a yearly innovation challenge. "The challenge is to come up with ideas to improve our business, and to compete with other groups within our business," he says.

Six proposals have made it through to the final judgement. "The best of the ideas we adopt, and we award a prize of some sort to the winning team. We are doing it for the first time this year. They are all great ideas, but we can't afford to do all of them."

It's similar to what happens at some of the world's leading technology companies, including Facebook. Speaking in Melbourne last August, former Facebook marketing director Randi Zuckerberg (Mark's older sister) explained how the company did it.

Part of Facebook's success, Zuckerberg says, lies in how it is able to preserve its start-up culture as the company grows. "There are so many Silicon Valley companies that, as they grow to several thousand employees, become corporate ... they become 'not cool' to work for."

Facebook avoided this by emphasising that good ideas – ideas that could change the company – could come from anyone. Facebook has always run 'hackathons', where its employees have all night to work on a project outside their area of work, and then present it to the company's leaders. "People did really fun things," Zuckerberg says. One group made a giant QR code on Facebook's roof that could be scanned from passing aeroplanes. Another group combined their love of Facebook with their love of beer, making a keg that would update Facebook whenever you poured from it.

But Facebook's employees have also made really useful things that have driven the growth of the social media network. Zuckerberg says: "Most of their great ideas didn't come from the top. They'd come from interns or low-level employees."

3.

SLEEP AT WORK

It's amazing how often we revert to old habits once our holidays are over. We forget about attending to our bodies' needs – rest, exercise, and good food – and we simply plough on, driven by stress and chocolate.

Leaders can supercharge their creative drive with a relatively simple change: allowing themselves to nap at work, according to one productivity expert, Tony Schwartz, CEO of The Energy Project and author of an article for Harvard Business Review, *The Productivity Paradox: How Sony Pictures Gets More Out of People by Demanding Less*.

Yes, it is a surprising one, but Schwartz recommends taking a 15-20 minute nap between 1pm and 4pm, especially on days when you have been short of sleep before coming to work. “Even a very short nap can dramatically increase your alertness and your productivity over the subsequent several hours,” Schwartz writes on his website.

If you want to supercharge your entire workforce, offer everyone the opportunity for a quick shut-eye in the afternoon and watch energy levels jump.

Schwartz also recommends scheduling time to think reflectively, creatively and/or strategically each week, a place where the smartphone has been left behind on your desk.

4.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM HERE?

Leaders are well aware of the need to reflect on their company's strategy, but the best of them push their brain to go "beyond the obvious". To join the rigorous thinkers, ask yourself some questions about the problems you are trying to get your business to solve.

- 1 Is the problem widely recognised?** There is no use coming up with a solution that can only benefit a handful of clients.
- 2 Does it affect other industries?** Can you roll the solution out using economies of scale and through your existing salesforce?
- 3 Are radical innovations needed to tackle the problem?** Well, if a Band-Aid will do, forget it. You need a solution that can build barriers to entry.
- 4 Can tackling it change the industry's economics?** Disruptive change is going to play into your hands by keeping your competitors busy.
- 5 Will addressing this issue give us a fresh source of competitive advantage?**
- 6 Would tackling this problem create a big opportunity for us?**

5.

GO BACK TO SCHOOL

When a staff survey showed Miles George, the CEO of energy company Infigen, that his workers wanted better leadership from him and his executive team, he turned to the Australian Graduate School of Management to help develop a training program specifically addressing the issues facing his company. He and his entire executive team went through this leadership training, and encouraged their staff to find opportunities to study that the company would pay for. The process changed the way the executives worked, encouraging greater collaboration between them, and making them more aware of how effectively they made decisions at meetings. For example, in the last five minutes of an executive meeting, George and his team ask: “Did we waste time, were we frank and honest, did everyone get a say? We reflect on our approach to decision-making and our performance in meetings.”

Greg Ellis, the CEO of the house-hunting site, Realestate.com.au, realised that his company did not have very strong line management skills when he joined it in 2008. Adopting a psychological profiling tool to assess the capability of his leaders, he decided to spend time training them all to bring them up to a higher standard. “It is managerial lack of understanding of how to manage people that is the first problem,” he says.

6.

WATCH YOUR SURROUNDINGS

Gavin Slater, the chief operating officer at NAB, likes airport lounges. He says they're a window into how people act under pressure.

"We fly a lot, and I see people react to flight changes or this and that happening. Watching someone deal with a check-in person or the flight crew.

"Some people do it really well and some people do it poorly."

This is important to Slater. He says leaders won't always have all the answers, but they have to keep their 'cool'. He draws inspiration from how others do this.

"The shadow you cast as a leader is a lot greater than you realise," he says. "We see ourselves as mere mortals, and we are. But for the staff, they'll look up to you and think, big job title, senior person. So you are always on show, and I think you have a duty to the organisation and all its stakeholders to maintain your composure."

7.

ASK THE EXPERTS

One way to get fired up is simply to spend some time with the experts, who spend their lives studying the way business leaders across the globe solve the problems they face.

Our leaders are among some of the lowest-educated in the world, studies have found. *LeadingCompany* research has determined that only one in five of the CEOs of the ASX 100 has completed an MBA.

One way leading companies fill knowledge gaps is to partner with universities, consultancies and think-tanks to benchmark their ideas and to challenge their thinking about both their business practices and their management style.

8.

READ AVIDLY

One thing unites many of the chief executives that *LeadingCompany* speaks to: they are avid readers.

They're not always reading the latest business books, magazines and websites either.

Elizabeth Proust, a non-executive director at Perpetual, spoke to us just as she finished reading a biography of Aboriginal Sydney Swans footballer Michael O'Loughlin.

"The standout to me is not Micky O, but his mother, who was determined she would raise her kids, with all the disadvantages of an indigenous woman in this country, to succeed," Proust says.

"He repaid her by buying her a van to take the rest of the kids to school, and buying her a house. There are some really deep values there. They are the things I find inspiring."

Richard Goyder, the Wesfarmers CEO, also looks to sporting biographies for inspiration, as well as the stories of inspiring political leaders such as Nelson Mandela.