

INSPIRATION

50 TIPS FROM THE TOP

In all areas of an organisation, the experience of peers can provide invaluable information and lessons for others. Here, *Priority* probes the minds of some of Australia's corporate leaders to bring you 50 insights that may help to build your business. **STORY** CHRIS SHEEDY

THE CEOs



PAUL GREENBERG
Co-founder and
Managing Director,
DealsDirect.com.au

I wish that 10 years ago I knew ... Frankly, I wouldn't have wanted to know what the next 10 years looked like because I enjoy the twists and turns along the way. I like online retail because there is a lot of change and uncertainty. It has long been said that we need a healthy dose of uncertainty in our lives!

What is the best way to source and retain the finest talent?

Often good people don't need to be found. If a talented performer likes your space and your business, they often reach out to you – the trick is recognising them! The key to retention is a mutual engagement between a company and its talent. Like all good relationships, it's a two-way street with lots of give and take on both sides.



NAOMI SIMSON
Founder and CEO
(Chief Experience Officer),
RedBalloon

I wish that 10 years ago I knew ... I was always in a hurry 10 years ago; everything was always urgent. In fact, my 30s are a blur of being a new parent and starting RedBalloon. I wish I had known yoga, learned to listen to my breathing and appreciated each moment for what it was, rather than rushing and not taking a moment to reflect on lessons learned.

What is the best way to source and retain the finest talent?

You must first know what your organisation stands for. Why do you do what you do? Second, it's about knowing what you stand for in terms of people, such as shared values, a commitment to learning and growth, being one of Australia's best places to work and listening to and responding to staff. When people know what your organisation stands for, great talent will find you.



DON GROVER
CEO, Dymocks Group
of Companies

I wish that 10 years ago I knew ... [ice hockey legend] Wayne Gretzky once said, "You miss 100 per cent of the shots you don't take." In life, you need to continue to take chances – chances on ideas and chances on people. Don't lose the courage of your convictions.

What is the best way to source and retain the finest talent?

Work with a combination of suppliers who know your industry best. But remember, the finest talent can be bred from within. Make sure your retention and recognition strategies are in place.



TRACEY FELLOWS
Managing Director,
Microsoft Australia

I wish that 10 years ago I knew ... how much business is really about people. I have learned that it is about recruiting talent, putting the right people together and giving them the opportunity and support to fulfil their potential. If work is something that our people do, not just a place they go, then we are on the right track.

What is the best way to source and retain the finest talent?

The best way to source talent is through your existing employees. This way, you're receiving referrals from those who already know the culture. To retain great people, you need to develop their talents and give them experiences that fuel learning. People need to feel respected and valued at work and know that what they're doing has an impact.



ELAINE HENRY
CEO, The Smith Family

I wish that 10 years ago I knew ... that today we would have a government willing and able to support an education revolution, particularly focusing on increasing the participation of disadvantaged kids and their families. We would have been bolder in our advocacy for change, recognising at the same time that it can be equally challenging to be too far ahead of public opinion.

What is the best way to source and retain the finest talent?

Nurturing extensive, cross-sectoral networks of relationships. The best thinkers are able to prove themselves across a range of portfolios, which means you need to think outside the box in considering where to look. The recommendation of someone you trust is infinitely more valuable than what might be written in a CV.

“The best thinkers are able to prove themselves across a range of portfolios ...”

THE CFOs



AARON RANDELL
Partner, Emerson Randell Young, and Financial Controller, Quicksmart Homes

Businesses tend to lose money when they ... take shortcuts. We see so many great businesses brought to their knees by the founders and / or management shortcutting, be it in personnel, advisers, product quality, funding and capital, and so on. Taking shortcuts, at any level, will ensure short-term losses and long-term failure.

The greatest business finance lesson I ever learned was ... before you enter into something, be it an active business or passive investment, first understand how you can get out of it. Without understanding your potential exit options, it's impossible to get the entry structure right. It is essential for every business owner to have a clear exit strategy from the outset.

“Taking shortcuts, at any level, will ensure short-term losses and long-term failure.”



MARINA JOANOU
CFO, Kmart

Businesses tend to lose money when they ... make hasty decisions and do not apply sufficient financial rigour to the process. This does not need to be an onerous task but working through the appropriate financial steps will, in most cases, unveil all reasonable risks that should be considered.

The greatest business finance lesson I ever learned was ... never underestimate the skills and information you can bring to the table. Regardless of the forum, there is always a place for sound business thinking.



KIRI DELLY
**General Manager Finance,
Operations and Events,
L'Oréal Melbourne
Fashion Festival**

Businesses tend to lose money when they ... don't listen. Listen to your clients to really get an understanding of their needs and expectations. A two-way relationship with clear partnership objectives is a true win-win situation. Listen to your suppliers – they can be your connection to what is really happening out there. Listen to your staff – the best ways companies can work better often come from those within the organisation.

The greatest business finance lesson I ever learned was ... to keep learning and, of course, listening. Situations change, ways of dealing with things change and you need to keep your business focused financially but still open to developments as needed. The other lesson is that you cannot overestimate the importance of good relationships. A company can go a long way if people truly want to do business with you.



DAVID MUNRO
Finance Director, Host

Businesses tend to lose money when they ... aren't flexible and don't react quickly to changes in market conditions. Lack of decisive leadership can mean companies persist with unprofitable business models rather than making the changes required to return to profitability. **The greatest business finance lesson I ever learned was ...** that open communication with clients at several levels within the hierarchy of the organisation is the key to understanding the client's needs and anticipating and addressing potential risks to the relationship.



ANDREW VIRGONA
**Regional Finance Director,
Unisys Asia Pacific**

“Lack of decisive leadership can mean companies persist with unprofitable business models rather than making changes ...”

Businesses tend to lose money when they ... don't understand the cost drivers of their business and how they can use them to grow the top line and improve the bottom line, resulting in misaligned objectives. You need to proactively manage cost drivers to maintain profitability, which will give you flexibility to respond to changes in your revenue mix.

The greatest business finance lesson I ever learned was ... to look at the drivers behind the whole business, including free cash flow, not just profit and loss. You need to build flexibility into your business; by collecting debts and managing cash flow, you free up operational cash to invest in growth rather than just plugging day-to-day expenses. This is particularly important if you want to capture new opportunities in the post-GFC economy.

THE
BUSINESS
ADVISERS
ROB HARTNETT
 Selling Strategies
 International

I know a business is in trouble when ... there is no laughter or smiles. Recently, I visited two businesses. At the first one, staff were quiet and hunched over PCs – no vibe in the office at all. Things weren't going well. The second business had plenty of smiles, people on phones, people talking about new activity. They had a culture of optimism. Same economy, same country, very different cultures.

What will be the greatest challenge for businesses in the next five years and how can they prepare for this? Leadership. Vision comes with leadership, then management is how you execute the vision of strong leadership. Many companies are run by "followers" who by nature are not innovative or creative – two key criteria needed for business growth. To develop future leaders requires focus and investment. Businesses must identify leaders early and train and mentor them in effective leadership and management skills.


**JULIA
BICKERSTAFF**
 The Business Bakery

I know a business is in trouble when ... it starts dropping prices. It's tempting to lower prices when sales are stagnant. Customers buy more, but they're like children – give them a lolly, or a price cut and they want another. Soon prices are so low the business must generate enormous volumes, needing a bigger audience reach and more inventory. Costs go up, margins fall and the business gets into trouble.

What will be the greatest challenge for businesses in the next five years and how can they prepare for this? Making the best of, but not being distracted by, online and technological advances. I see businesses falling into two camps – the ones devoting too much time and energy to social media and neglecting the core business, and the rest of the business world still hoping this newfangled stuff will go away. Successful businesses will have a well-planned online strategy supported by time invested in leveraging technology.


TONY GATTARI
 Achievers Group Pty Ltd

I know a business is in trouble when ... the owner or management team are in denial, find excuses and blame others for the lack of business performance. The other sign of a problem is when the company has too much debt and not enough cash flow. Turnover is vanity, profit is sanity, cash flow is reality.

What will be the greatest challenge for businesses in the next five years and how can they prepare for this? The greatest challenge is to understand that the role of any business is to solve problems. The big problem of the consumer is lack of time, attention and trust. Most companies market problems that have already been solved, thus wasting money and resources. You must test and measure everything, eliminating strategies that don't work and systemising and continuing those that do. Be quick, responsive and flexible.


PAUL SMITH
 Carnegie Management
 Group

I know a business is in trouble when ... I ask the manager where they see themselves and their company in five to 10 years and they just give me a glazed look. Also, when I ask what their key problems are and their answer is, "I'm spending 80 hours a week working and just getting stressed and tired." They're working too much *in* the business and not enough *on* it.

What will be the greatest challenge for businesses in the next five years and how can they prepare for this? During the GFC, strategic planning was replaced by panic. Thanks to the great economic period before that, many had thrown risk management out the door. This lack of strategic vision, getting rid of good people (which creates a poor reputation) and lack of risk management mean companies must ask where they're heading and what their workplace culture is going to be, then implement systems and protocols.



MEENA THURAISSINGHAM
Organisational Psychologist, TalentInvest

I know a business is in trouble when ... its leadership does not operate as a team and is driven by turf wars. They spend more energy and time competing with each other rather than with competitors. It is often compounded by structures, systems and processes that may magnify these issues, such as the way business unit revenue is accounted for, or the way compensation systems are structured.

What will be the greatest challenge for businesses in the next five years and how can they prepare for this? Despite the short reprieve caused by the GFC, the retention of talent is starting to rear its head as a critical impediment to recovery. This retention challenge, if not taken seriously by companies, will not only impede recovery but will help a company's competitors steal the march on its plans to emerge stronger from the economic downturn.

THE MARKETERS



JANE HAYES
Marketing Manager, Pan Macmillan Australia
Marketing-wise, I get the best results when I ...

... have the right lead-up time for a campaign. Deadlines are important but to take a step back and view the campaign from a distance and as a whole gives you a chance to find the gaps rather than racing against the clock. Some of the best ideas can come in the most unexpected places, whether it's the beach, the swimming pool, the airport – anywhere outside the office.

The future of marketing will be about ... using a mix of traditional and new media and using more interactive components by including some of the senses, not just sight. Adding sound and movement to your online advertising or using experiential marketing that incorporates touch, smell and taste can produce that golden, unpaid-for word-of-mouth campaign.



“Stop using ‘we–we’ language and start using ‘you–you’ language, because people only want to know what’s in it for them.”

ANDREW MENDELAWITZ
Marketing Consultant, 8th Avenue Communications
Marketing-wise, I get the best results when I ...

... eliminate self-indulgent corporate-speak and say something that counts. Stop using self-obsessed “we–we” language and start using “you–you” language, because people only want to know what’s in it for them.

The future of marketing will be about ... matching consumer expectations with the experience they get. A changing world is simply going to change expectations. For example, the sugary cereal spruiked as “healthy” will ring less true in an era when people are more aware of nutrition. Still, people will want to satisfy age-old needs and wants. You can’t fail with money, sex, power, freedom or envy.



PETER SINCLAIR
Marketing Director, Carlton & United Breweries

Marketing-wise, I get the best results when I ... have (1) rigorous strategy, and (2) the best people. Rigorous strategy provides clarity of direction, focus on the big bets that matter and engagement throughout the team. The best people, when encouraged to do groundbreaking work in a culture that recognises and rewards, will deliver outstanding results against the crystal-clear strategy. Strategy and people deliver results.

The future of marketing will be about ... the application of timeless marketing best practices applied in new and emerging media. Timeless marketing practices will always be superior consumer understanding, passionate brand custodianship and the ability to sniff a big idea. New and emerging mediums are tied to the technology revolution and the rise and rise of social networking / marketing.



CAMERON WATSON
Head of Marketing, World Vision Australia

Marketing-wise, I get the best results when I ... start with data and insights, using real data (response from each medium and channel) and real consumer insights (quantitative and qualitative) to understand the core reasons for past success and the balance with current market realities. I then apply the data and insights across all elements – from creative and media placement all the way down to paper stock.

The future of marketing will be about ... integration and convergence. With the proliferation of TV and radio across multiple digital channels, no longer can you put a 30-second spot out there and assume everyone will see it. Clever marketers will integrate their message into TV / radio programming content, retail partnerships, online / social media and outdoor, as well as traditional spots. It will translate into a consistent message received by the consumer.



LAWRENCE HENNESSY

National Marketing Manager, WWF-Australia

Marketing-wise, I get the best results when I ... am able to promote truthful and useful products, or highlight urgent issues that strike an emotional chord. To be able to speak genuinely when reaching out to an audience is made easier working for WWF, and I feel great personal satisfaction in doing so.

The future of marketing will be about ... moving from transactional marketing to deeper emotional connections. A global cultural shift to sustainable and socially responsible platforms will drive people to proactively seek out rather than passively receive. Products and brands of choice will demonstrate an alignment to their own personal values, through either sustainable manufacturing processes or synergy with company ethics.

THE SALES TEAM



STEPHANIE CHRISTOPHER
National Director & Head of Sales, SHL

The most important lesson to teach your sales team is ... to listen to clients more than you talk to them. Ensure that you're aware of where a client is up to in the sales cycle – don't just focus on closing the deal. Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and ensure a good range of options that will meet unique client needs.

How do you establish and sustain a lifetime relationship with a customer? Really get to know your customer and understand their business needs right from the get-go. Differentiate your company from your competitors. Demonstrate how you can add value and enhance their business standards. Ensure that solutions constantly evolve with the client and provide opportunities to help them grow their business. Don't forget to maintain contact, even after the sale is secured.



PAUL CRIGHTON
Vice President of Sales,
Asia-Pacific, Premiere
Global (PGi)

The most important lesson to teach your sales team is ... to think one step ahead. Put yourself in the shoes of your client and ask, "What are my needs?" Being a great salesperson is being able to recognise a gap between where the client is and where they want to be, then bridging it. Always develop the three key areas that ensure success as a salesperson: activity, skill set and pipeline.

How do you establish and sustain a lifetime relationship with a customer? By being proactive, open and honest. They are the three principles of any successful long-term relationship. It's no longer about how you close the deal but more about how you and the customer arrive at the same business conclusion. Find the rising stars within your company and ensure that you're assisting them in providing strong ROI and compelling business drivers for the solution you're selling.



SESIL ARZADIAN
Sales Manager, ANTON
Jewellery

The most important lesson to teach your sales team is ... without customers, there is no business. Being in a luxury industry, it is important for our sales team to have superior knowledge of all products and services; however, the most important thing to our company is service. So it's my main priority to keep our sales team passionate about our jewellery and motivated to listen and to understand our customers' needs.

How do you establish and sustain a lifetime relationship with a customer? We pride ourselves on welcoming customers as they walk in and we try to ascertain the purpose of their visit and congratulate them if it's a significant event. We also explain the complimentary services our stores can provide, to encourage them to return. Most importantly, we thank them for their custom and inform them that we look forward to seeing them again.



TODD CLARKSON
National Sales &
Marketing Manager,
Brands Worldwide Pty Ltd

The most important lesson to teach your sales team is ... "no" is only no at that point in time. There are many things that affect somebody's decision to purchase and if a salesperson is unsuccessful the first, second or even third time there is no reason that the fourth time cannot be the time they hear "yes"!

How do you establish and sustain a lifetime relationship with a customer? It's about providing quality and innovation in our products while keeping them affordably priced. We want consumers to expect that a product from one of our brands will provide a certain level of quality and value. They need to be able to trust our brands to deliver what they expect. ■



GARY KATZEFF
National Sales Manager,
MYOB

The most important lesson to teach your sales team is ... focus and discipline. To attain success in complex solution selling, team members are well trained in an appropriate sales methodology. They have to understand their customers by linking the customers' needs to the benefits of the solution in order to build significant value.

How do you establish and sustain a lifetime relationship with a customer? At MYOB, we clearly understand that sustainable customer relationships are based on a long-term value exchange. As our customers grow and evolve their businesses, we continually engage with them to extend and modify our solutions in order to keep adding value to their businesses.