

## **REPORT TO HR PARTNERS FROM HR PARTNERS SCHOLARSHIP WINNER, KATHRYN BELLION MGSM LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, 4 – 6 May, 2009**

### **General comments**

The MGSM Leadership Development Program was an extremely useful 3-day course aimed at high potential managers seeking to enhance their strategic thinking, leadership and influencing skills which I was very fortunate to attend 4 – 6 May, having been awarded the HR Partners' scholarship. Originally, I was scheduled to attend the HR Leaders' Program but unfortunately, due to a lack of numbers, MGSM suggested attending the Leadership Development Program which covered much of the same ground but was geared to a broader range of functional managers. Within a class of 13, there were to be 3 attendees from the HR field. David Owens, Managing Director of HR Partners kindly agreed to my attending this program instead.

In terms of practicalities, MGSM proved to be an excellent training provider and offered good accommodation facilities (the opportunity to take advantage of these, especially travelling up from Melbourne, was much appreciated). The course administration was efficient and MGSM offered a personable service.

Without fail, the course presenters were engaging and knowledgeable. They provided theoretical concepts backed up by peer reviewed research (which is very important to someone who works in a research institute, albeit in human resources) and pertinent, practical examples delivered in an approachable style with generous doses of humour.

The three days sped by too quickly which was to be expected as time flies when you're having fun (and learning at the same time)! Attending the course with me was a great group of intelligent, generous people who were also very friendly and welcoming. The course was structured around sharing of theoretical concepts, provision of practical guidance and examples, individual, paired and group discussion and presentations. There were no role plays although we did have to improvise and present in front of a NIDA Corporate Trainer and actor!

Although not dedicated specifically to HR leaders, it was certainly useful to hear the experiences of those in other disciplines because of course, our function must be embedded in all aspects of the business. The diversity of the attendees' backgrounds added to the whole experience and to hear again and again how many of the leadership issues we covered focus on the human element within organisations, which we in HR have known for quite some time, was particularly affirming for our discipline.

### **Day 1 – planning for our own careers and surviving in our organisations without obvious capacity to influence**

Randall Tame articulated the big issues for leaders and talked us through his keys to leadership - understanding oneself (EQ), being credible and the importance of influencing strategies.

After a relaxation technique which led to us writing our own career vision and priorities for life in general (!), we then covered influence versus power, credibility, networking, politics within an organisation, and knowing your allies, enemies and neutrals within an organisation and how to "use" these to our best advantage (or neutralise them if we can't).

### **Day 2 - leadership**

Melanie O'Connor took us through a huge topic and a lot of ground was covered. We looked at our leadership styles and came to the conclusion that leaders are often defined by their followers and their interactions. An important concept covered early on this day was the "Apache approach" – standing *behind* the person with whom we interact so we see what they see ie their perspective. This was very much about putting oneself in the shoes of others to work out what motivates and moves them and adjusting our leadership style to suit the people we lead accordingly for best outcomes.

In Melanie's view (and based on the research!) leaders are made, not born and her key to leadership is to always be true to yourself by "sitting" in our natural leadership style but to acquire the ability to move

through the different styles she outlined depending on who we are leading and what will get the best results.

The day ended with an excellent “speed dating” exercise and no, this wasn’t RSVP.com for leaders. In practice, this involved participants pairing up and then rotating around the room after a two minute slot in which we outlined concisely an organisational issue we face and our temporary partner gave their immediate response as to how they would solve that issue. For a HR practitioner often required to coach others to solve problems, or solve problems for them, this made a nice change and also presented an opportunity to brainstorm ideas and tap into the thinking of leaders from different backgrounds for a range of different solutions.

### **Day 3 – change management and communicating with impact**

Professor James Carlopio was an excellent presenter for the first part of Day 3 in which he managed to inculcate in all participants the message that change is a function of people *and* the social environment (change =  $f(p + Se)$ ). In change management, we often forget that if the structures around a change are not adapted or altered to accommodate the change in the short-, medium- and long-term, our people will fall back into old behaviours or ways of doing things. To understand a change is one thing, but to be able to change to bring about a sustainable difference and be supported to do so by the way we as an organisation *do* things, is often quite another in practice.

Professor Carlopio delivered an enjoyable, punchy session backed up by thorough research which was condensed yet still intelligible.

The second half of day 3 saw actor Gerry Sont from NIDA showing us how to communicate with impact. This was probably the most fun session and a great chance to improvise and step outside of ourselves. Gerry provided us with examples of stage craft and some of his acting tips to make our presentations (be they formal or not) more impactful and memorable. As a HR practitioner, this is particularly important and it moved beyond the usual professional presentation fare normally offered.

### **Summary and where to from here**

In many ways, the program exposes the attendee to thoroughly interesting, enjoyable and accessible snapshots of very big topics. We in HR tend to know quite a bit about these but for me, the program built upon this pre-knowledge to focus on the individual and my role as a leader and what *we can do* immediately when back in the workplace and down the track in our careers to enhance our leadership skills and foster this in others.

I certainly feel encouraged to delve deeper and continue my development and spent the morning after day 3 when I first got out of bed writing my own reflections on the program and reiterating my personal and career affirmations.

I also used some of the learnings to think about activities for my team’s annual strategic planning session coming up in July and have implemented “ally”, “neutral” and “enemy” stakeholder mapping within my team for all our new initiatives now. The night of the last day, I went to dinner with a friend and fellow HR practitioner and told her all about the program because it really was that enjoyable and I have shared information about the course with other colleagues too.

I encourage others to attend this or a similar program. The networking was terrific and I think that in the case of this Program, which wasn’t geared specifically to HR practitioners, the opportunity to show managers in other fields *our* business perspective and see first-hand that it’s the “people issues” that matter most to or challenge them, was a great personal re-emphasis (not that it was needed) for our discipline and its significance now and in the future.

Thank you to the Macquarie Graduate School of Management but most especially to HR Partners for this fantastic opportunity!

Kathryn Bellion, 20 May 2009