



PEOPLE POWER

ENERGY IN MANAGEMENT IS FICKLE, BUT WHEN THINGS GO WELL IT CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS

STORY NARELLE HOOPER ❖ PHOTOGRAPHY NIC WALKER

Ask most CEOs to name their vital wingman and they nominate their CFO. Not chief executive Chris Beer, of eyewear company Luxottica Australasia. He names group general manager of human resources Rhonda Brighton – without hesitation. When Beer was on extended leave recently, Brighton and chief financial officer Peter McClelland shared acting CEO duties. This caused some good-natured ribbing but it underscores the collaborative approach that has set the scene for the business' speedy transformation to a high-performance culture.

Beer says the company's top team members are deep believers in the idea that culture drives performance. He says almost three years ago "we really started rethinking the organisation and redesigning it from an employee and customer value proposition and then worked on building everything around that".

Brighton adds, "We had a very social culture, and we knitted it with a metric-focused one: high performance, highly collaborative and courageous in terms of the creativity."

It's an approach that helped the company win several 2009 Australian Human Resources Institute National Awards. Luxottica won a prize for HR impact, Brighton won honours for HR leadership, and manufacturing manager Michael Fretwell took the gong for manager of the year. The judges particularly noted a strong alignment between the company's HR team, line managers and executive team, and a strategic approach to HR that made it a fundamental contributor to financial performance.

The transformation helped turn around Luxottica's fortunes after the Milan-based group bought out OPSM in 2004 and continued to expand. Looking ahead, one of the major upcoming tasks for Luxottica Australasia will be handling the rapid growth of its regional responsibilities while maintaining heightened levels of organisational support and staff engagement. **B**

Rhonda Brighton: joined Luxottica in late 2006 from Sara Lee in Chicago, where she was vice-president of organisational development. She also had been director of employee relations and organisational development for Dutch coffee maker Douwe Egberts.

Chris Beer: started on the shop floor at OPSM in 1984 and worked his way up through sales and operations as international HR manager and head of retail for OPSM Australia. For six months, he ran Dymocks before returning as CEO under OPSM's new owners, Luxottica, in 2004.

THE WINNERS

❖ Recipients of the AHRI National Awards were selected from 50 shortlisted finalists. Entrants were evaluated based on statements, evidence, 360-degree assessments, data and surveys. Leaders attached to each award performed final judging. Submissions for the HR Impact award were analysed by workforce planning company Infohrm, then assessed by a national panel. Winners are:

- ❖ HR Student of the Year, **Jacqui Knights**
- ❖ HR Rising Star of the Year **Jessica Booth, CSIRO**
- ❖ HR Practitioner of the Year **Lisbeth Rees, ING Australia**
- ❖ HR Impact Award **Luxottica, Comcare Australia, Corrs Chambers Westgarth**
- ❖ Danah Zohar Award for Corporate Social Responsibility **Allens Arthur Robinson**
- ❖ Wayne Cascio Award for Responsible Restructuring **Bupa Australia**
- ❖ Dave Ulrich HR Leader of the Year **Rhonda Brighton, Luxottica**
- ❖ Lynda Gratton Manager of the Year **Michael Fretwell, Luxottica**
- ❖ Pru Goward Award for Diversity Management **BEST Community Development**
- ❖ Rob Goffee Award for Talent Management **Coca-Cola Amatil**
- ❖ Martin Seligman Award for Health & Wellbeing **Greenslopes Private Hospital**
- ❖ John Boudreau Award for Human Capital Management **Optus**
- ❖ Fons Trompenaars Award for Cross Cultural Management **Teys Bros**