



Rosemary Conn

National Partnership Manager,
The Beacon Foundation

Professional development is a valuable investment by employers. And it returns dividends. But in the cash-strapped not-for-profit sector, the training budget can face greater scrutiny than in corporate organisations.

Rosemary Conn from the Beacon Foundation is well aware of those budget constraints.

“When you’re raising funds to help disadvantaged youth, spending money on leadership development tends to drop down the list a bit” she says.

The Beacon Foundation works in schools to help inspire kids to stick to positive pathways. That could mean motivating a young person to stay at school and optimise

his or her educational outcomes, or providing support for a transition to employment, other education or training.

“The number of unemployed 15 – 19 year olds in Australia is really alarming” says Rosemary.

“Some teenagers don’t have the skills or confidence to take the next step into further education or employment. Beacon helps guide them towards a brighter future” she says.

With a limited budget, Rosemary’s development opportunities were few and far between. She recognised she needed some professional development if she was to become a better and more valuable leader in her organisation.

Beacon supported Rosemary’s application to attend the General Manager Program. And in assessing her application, AGSM saw the merit in providing Rosemary with a scholarship to attend.

“I was so delighted to receive the General Manager Program scholarship” she says.

“I am in a senior role within my organisation. But to satisfy my own performance and leadership expectations, I felt I needed to reconnect with the latest business thinking and practices from the corporate sector. My scholarship made that possible, without placing a financial impost on Beacon.”

The slow reveal

One of the compelling aspects of external training is the opportunity to interact with a diverse range of people from different industry backgrounds.

Rosemary said this was definitely the case in her program. But there was a twist that she wasn’t expecting.

“It deviated from the classic style management course” she said. “I don’t want to sound clichéd, but it really was like we were on a journey.”

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puzzle. Your assumptions are challenged. Your thinking is probed...eventually revealing a better understanding of yourself and how you interact within your work environment.”

“It was quite reflective. But at the same time, really intense.”

“You start working early in the morning with team exercises. Then you work through until 10pm – the focus on physical and mental wellbeing brought a really valuable and unique dimension to the course.”

Rosemary says that resilience is a key competency in her line of work. “Burn-out is a significant issue in the not-for-profit sector, so resilience is essential to be a successful and inspiring leader.”

High energy

Rosemary is very enthusiastic about the presentation and delivery of the program.

“The program director and two other coaches who were with us for the course duration were amazing. They have so much experience and they bring it and share it at every session” she said.

“They have a great style. They don’t lecture, but rather ask questions and open up debate. With discussion comes a reframing of your thinking...a new perspective.”

Rosemary also believes the informal coaching between sessions was extremely beneficial.

“Every discussion adds value and is part of the learning process” she says. “As leaders we must consider all angles, all points of view, rather than locking in a position without considering an innovative alternative.”

Collaboration vs competition

Competitive and political behaviour is rife in all organisations. Learning how to identify where the power rests and how to navigate through political power play is so important for leaders.

“Collaboration makes sense – especially in the not-for-profit sector” says Rosemary. “But instinctively, we’re drawn to compete – even within the same organisation.”

“During my program, I reflected on the incentives different organisations use to drive performance. But really, all they encourage is competitive behaviour.”

“I’m far more aware of this now and will really focus on cultivating genuine collaboration within Beacon” she says.

The future

“I’m committed to driving change in the social justice arena. And I’m already acting on some of the goals I formed during my course” Rosemary says proudly.

“I’ve also been thinking about how I can use different leadership styles, depending on the circumstance and environment.”

“That skill really came under the microscope on the course...working in groups, under pressure when we’re all leaders!”

Rosemary is faced with demanding growth targets in her role at Beacon. But with her increased ability to influence and engage others, she is confident she will be able to deliver.

“I feel I’m up for the difficult conversations that might be required. I feel I have the credibility to challenge strategy or actions I don’t believe in. And I’ve got the focus to ensure my actual values remain true to my espoused values” she says.

“My program was such a valuable gift towards my professional development. I am very, very appreciative. Now it’s up to me to take ownership of what I want to achieve and make the changes required. Watch this space!”

For more information

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