

# DEVELOPING LEADERS: STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGE



**UNSW**  
AUSTRALIA

AGSM @ UNSW Business School  
Executive Education

Never Stand Still

Business School



**UNSW**  
AUSTRALIA



Business School

# DANE MENELAWS

Manager, Financial Accounting and  
Reporting, FIIG Securities

---

"I AM MORE CONFIDENT AS A  
MANAGER AND ABLE TO MAKE  
MORE STRATEGIC DECISIONS.  
I'VE STEPPED UP AS A  
LEADER."

---



Dane Menelaws started as a financial accountant in a small finance team at FIIG Securities Limited, a firm providing innovative fixed income securities investment options, research and education. As the organisation grew rapidly, so did his responsibilities.

Dane's technical expertise earned him a new role; he was responsible for not only the companies' financial reporting, something well within his comfort zone, but also managing a growing accounting team, a new challenge.

"I transitioned pretty quickly from a technical role to managing the accounting team. It was exciting but also a little daunting in that I had to make a shift from being heavily project-based to being more strategic and people-focused. I'd mentored junior finance team members informally, but this was my first formal people management role." Dane says.

His dedication, technical excellence and commitment to company values were recognised when he was awarded FIIG's annual CEO's Award. The award provided funding for professional development and Dane saw this as an opportunity to make his transition to leadership as successful as his technical career.

#### **Building personal confidence**

"My CEO and I quickly decided that we needed to look at

executive education. I wanted to come out of my shell a bit, so as a first step, I was looking for a program to build my confidence and AGSM's Authentic Communicator program fit the bill."

**The Authentic Communicator: Activating Presence**, a two day presence and communication program, harnesses innovative techniques used in the acting and performance spheres to improve confidence, presence and style in 1:1 conversations, meetings and presentations. "It was my first program with AGSM Executive Education and it was a great lead-in; it was so high energy!" Dane recalls, enthusiastically.

"The program team were fantastic, they really picked up on where everyone was at very quickly and worked with each participant individually. I worked extensively with (Program Presenter) Jo O'Reilly and found her excellent. She really helped me nail down my personal challenges and work to improve them. I was amazed that this could be done on a two day program."

During the program, participants are filmed doing a short presentation which is then debriefed one on one in a coaching session with a member of the program team.

"I was nervous; before I saw the recording, I

---

**"I COULD NOT STOP TALKING ABOUT THE PROGRAM....IT WAS A REVELATION ...."**

---

thought 'this is going to be bad!' When I watched it, however, I realised, it wasn't great, but it wasn't terrible either, I actually had a decent base to work with. Supported by Jo, I was quickly able to see what I needed to do to improve. In a word, it was powerful."

Dane walked away from the program feeling confident, energised and motivated. "I had a family gathering the weekend after, and I remember I could not stop talking about the program and what I had learnt. It was a revelation that I could actually do this and when I got back to work, I did."

### **Making the transition from operational to strategic**

Now armed with a new confidence, Dane recognised that his next challenge was to shift his focus from operational to strategic. He returned to AGSM Executive Education to undertake **Developing the Strategic Manager**, a two day program designed develop a more strategic

mindset to align team goals and activities with the organisational strategy.

"This was also a great program" Dane says. "It's practical in that it gives you the tools to develop a more strategic outlook. It made me see that strategy is easy to talk about, you can put as many words on a board as you like, but if you aren't aligning what your team is doing to what the organisation as a whole is trying to achieve, they're just words on a board. Understanding how to build this alignment really helped me to deliver."

### **Owning a place the leadership table**

Having undertaken two AGSM Executive Education programs, Dane had made significant progress toward achieving his AGSM Certificate in Executive and Management Development. This certificate provides recognition of commitment to professional development, from a globally-recognised business school and can also be used as a pathway into the AGSM MBA Program.

Dane needed to complete one more program, and he had clear goals. "The next step was to strengthen my leadership skills to step up in executive and senior leadership settings. I was at the table with people who already had runs on the board so I wanted to be able to take my place and feel like I belonged there. "

To meet these goals, Dane selected the AGSM **Emerging Manager Program**, a residential experience that accelerates the journey from technical team member to leader. The program is the first step of the Career Transitions suite, designed to help leaders develop the skills, tools and mindsets to take on new leadership challenges.

The Emerging Manager Program takes participants through a series of intensive leadership development sessions and activities supported by both formal program team and peer-to-peer coaching. For Dane, the sessions on situational leadership really struck a chord.

"To realise I could get so much more out of my team by adapting my approach was powerful. Prior to the program, I guess I was either doing tasks or delegating them, not taking the time to realise that I could support my team members in finding solutions for themselves and that this would lead to a happier team."

The journey also takes participants beyond professional development to reflecting on personal experiences to understand, balance and leverage the link between career and personal life.

"Quite unexpectedly for me, the work/life balance sessions had so much impact. I really reflected on what I could do to grow as a person. In one

session, we shared the life experiences that had shaped us and it led to all of us admitting and facing up to some home truths. I wouldn't have thought this at the beginning of the program, but it was so powerful and it really changes you and sets

you on a new course." Dane reflects.

The residential format, a key feature of the program, allows participants to step out of the day-to-day work environment, reflect on their leadership and immerse themselves in the learning experience. "I had never done a residential program before and I was worried it might be overwhelming, but when you are there and you are connecting with other participants it doesn't feel like that at all. You're learning a great deal, and there is so much interaction with both the program team and other participants it goes by so quickly! It was a really good balance and an excellent experience."

The program is an interactive experience with peer-to-peer learning and coaching being key elements to its success. A diverse participant mix maximises opportunities for cross-industry collaboration. "I really enjoyed learning from my peers as much as from the program team. I went in with the idea that my challenges were far more unique to a finance environment than they actually were. We had a really great group, a mix of

---

**"THIS WAS A REALLY GREAT PROGRAM TO FINISH MY JOURNEY AND CEMENT MY TRANSITION TO LEADERSHIP."**

---

professional experiences, ages and cultures but we could all relate so well to each other. It was mind-blowing to realise just how much you had in common."

The strength of these participant interactions also led to the development of a close professional network for Dane. "I still keep in contact with some of the other participants. It's great to share the journey and have others in the same boat to discuss experiences and bounce ideas off."

"This was a really great program to finish my development journey and really cement my transition to leadership. It brought together all the concepts I had learnt and put them into context. It was the crescendo, if you like."

### **Stepping up to the challenge**

Dane found the transition back to work post-program to be a turning point for his leadership career.

"I'm more confident as a manager and able to

make more strategic decisions. I've stepped up as a leader and am taking more initiative rather than always seeking permission. My CFO has definitely noticed that.

My team really appreciate the change in my leadership style too. Rather than either completely delegating or micromanaging tasks, I've really grown and I am able to take a different approach and play a more supportive coaching role."

My program experience also taught me the importance and value of taking time to reflect and review. We finished an audit at about the same time as I finished the Emerging Manager Program, and I really took time with the team to look at what we did well and identify where we could improve this financial year, which was so valuable."

"I'm also improving my work/life balance. I used to be involved with community groups, but I got so busy at work that I stepped out of that. I've got a young family I always want to spend more time with. So I'm now seeing that doing things I enjoy outside work can actually have a positive impact on performance."

A key career outcome for Dane has been his increasing involvement with strategic projects at an organisational level. "The Emerging Manager Program really helped me to identify that I need to be more proactive in getting myself involved with major strategic projects. Since the program, I have put myself forward for various projects and working groups alongside senior executives from across the business to improve revenue and customer experience."

"I get to be so much more forward-thinking, working on organisation-wide initiatives that are helping to deliver the company strategy and determining the tomorrow of the business. I am now part of that."