



**DO WHAT YOU  
SAY YOU'LL DO**

And other tools to LEAD courageously

## ***Interview with Donny Walford***

*Donny Walford is an experienced Non Executive Director and CEO of public unlisted companies and various strategic boards in the Finance, Defence and Government industry sectors with specific expertise in Strategy, Finance, Strategic Marketing and building businesses. The founder and Managing Director of DW Behind Closed Doors Pty Ltd (BCD) and DW Bottom Line Pty Ltd (Bottomline) Transition Strategists™, Donny has an extensive background at Executive and senior management levels in banking, finance, business services, government and human resources.*

**Is there one single characteristic you have seen in the leaders you have worked with that defines and sets them apart?**

Great sense of self-belief and confidence

**What one action do you think any leader (irrespective of their experience) could make today, which would make a difference to the way that they lead their organisation?**

Be authentic

**Is there anything that you think that Australian leaders do differently, that we can share with the rest of the world?**

Australians in general are more relaxed and laid back and in general that follows through into leadership roles. We do love to “poke fun”/”stir” people for fun. So in general I guess like to have fun.

**What can we learn from the rest of the world?**

Celebrate what you learn from failures – encourage people to learn from their mistakes and have another go (and keep having a go). Bankruptcy is a perfect example – Americans look at it as an opportunity and Australians look at it as a total failure. Lose the Tall Poppy attitude – continue to encourage people who succeed not “bring them down”.

**What attributes do you think are most critical to leaders of today?**

Resilient, persuasive/influential, persistent, determined, tenacious, passionate, good at building and maintaining relationships and authentic with a high level of integrity.

**What attributes will we need going forward into the future?**

Adapt to change and trends quicker, be flexible in thinking and actions and be very good communicators especially listening. Understand how to manage and lead at least five different generations in an organisation from 18 year olds to 70 year olds.



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### **What advice would you give emerging leaders who are seeking to grow and develop into leaders that truly make a difference?**

Take risks, develop networks and relationships with key influencers, identify mentors -both male and female and get an internal and external sponsor to promote you to others.

### **How important do you think that mentors are in leadership?**

Very important; it's lonely at the top for both men and women so a mentor becomes an important "support" for you in leadership positions and they will help you to understand yourself and others better. Mentors improve you professionally as well as personally. The mentor is a very useful sounding board for testing new ideas and covering off various issues that arise in your professional and personal life.

### **How would you recommend an emerging leader choose a mentor?**

Understand what outcomes you want from the mentoring relationship. Ask people you trust whom they recommend could help you achieve your outcomes or identify a mentor from people you have met or heard of. They do not have to be in your industry sector. Make a personal approach. There are organisations that offer coaching and mentoring services and are adept at identifying a mentor for you. It's critical you meet with your proposed mentor to decide if you can work together before formalising the relationship.

### **What characteristics should they look for?**

The most important aspect is trust – you must feel you can be open and honest with your mentor and that all discussions are confidential. They must be a good listener and ask good challenging and thought provoking questions.

### **How can they tell that the relationship is working?**

At the first meeting, Mentor and Mentee need to:

- Discuss expectations of the mentoring process and anticipated outcomes, and general objectives
- Talk about ambitions, development goals, mutual expectations
- Decide when and where to meet and for how long.
- Choose a time and place/venue for mentoring sessions. If possible, away from your workplace.

The mentee will know the relationship is working because they are being challenged and growing professionally and personally and they are achieving their outcomes. If you are totally honest and open with your mentor and growing in confidence then the relationship is adding value.



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**Have you personally had a mentor that has helped you grow and develop as a leader?**

I have had a series of informal mentors during my career and business life. As one of few women in senior management and executive roles there were few role models so most of my mentors and role models have been men. My female role model is Carolyn Hewson AO. Carolyn only needs to make one suggestion, statement or ask one thought provoking question and you can go forward for another year based on that wisdom.

**What message would you give to young women going through high school and university that would help them unlock their own passion to ask “why?” and to engage with some of the important issues of the day; paving the way for our future female leaders?**

Some teachers and lecturers do encourage young women to question and believe they can do anything. If they are not encouraged to follow their passion, ask questions, get involved in whatever they choose then my message is to mix with people that will encourage and support them. Don't be afraid to “walk - vote with your feet” if you are in the wrong environment. If people put you down, discourage you, tell you that you can't do something, do not let their negativity or lack of courage deter you from realising your passion and goals. After all, that will make you stand out amongst mediocrity.

**Do you think we are doing enough to engage the young kids of today to think differently and show that they can make a difference?**

We can do a lot to engage young people, to learn from them and in turn they can learn from us. Young people have no limitations unless we impose them. We need more role models to demonstrate how they can make a difference and we need to support them when they make mistakes and continually develop them and build their confidence.

**What do women need to do to be recognised more as the leaders that they are?**

Get over the cringe factor that if you promote your achievements and put yourself forward is boastful and egotistical. Women need to understand that they can learn on the job and they don't need to tick 10 out of 10 boxes to go for a promotion or new opportunity. They need to learn to position themselves with key influencers and get on their radar. They also need to establish relationships with their peers and people above them i.e. spend 80% of their time in the team they are a member of, not 80% of their time in the team they are leading.



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### **What would you say to a parent trying to manage both a family and caring responsibility who has also taken on a leadership role?**

Ask for help! You don't have to do it all. If you don't have a supportive partner who you can share the load with nor family support networks then outsource domestic duties such as cleaning, ironing and shopping. Delegate at work – builds trust in the team and allows them to step up. If you are a perfectionist, take some of the pressure off by changing your mindset and be comfortable with meeting expectations not always exceeding them.

### **Is it possible to “have it all” or does something have to give somewhere along the line? Or is it simply a matter of getting up earlier, being more efficient, prioritizing the things that matter.**

Some women say you can have it all but not all at once. Others say you can have it all and they are the ones who are not so hard on themselves, have realistic expectations and do what I describe above i.e. outsource, delegate and ask for help. Asking for help is a strength not a weakness!

### **What advice do you give emerging leaders on the issue of self care? How do they balance the stress that the politics, expectations etc can create? Any tips that you have learnt along the way?**

Do not set yourself up for failure by striving for work life balance. Strive for work life FLOW. Do what you love and love what you do.

Life and work then flows in with each other. Learn to be selfish – it's not a bad word. Learn to put some time away each week for you – to read a book, do exercise, lunch or coffee with a friend, go for a massage – whatever your passion and enjoyment is – do it!

### **What pitfalls do you think that emerging leaders have to watch out for on taking on a new leadership role?**

Women often suffer from the imposter syndrome. They feel uncomfortable having older or more experienced people reporting to them, that they don't know it all and someone is going to tap them on the shoulder and say that they are a fraud. It's about confidence and time – time in the role. The team will learn to respect you, as you will them. Don't be afraid to admit you don't know it all and you rely on them and their knowledge. You have strengths and attributes they don't possess so you complement and leverage from each other. Play to your strengths and only fight the good fight. Don't take things personally and definitely don't over analyse what is said.



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### **Given your very hectic schedule, how do you find time to prioritise health and wellbeing for yourself?**

I get up at 5.15am for a run or a bike ride and I workout with my husband. I remain disciplined to work out at least four days a week and strive for five or six days. I practice Hot Yoga one night a week and don't ever feel guilty I am looking after my health and fitness. It helps keep me balanced in working long hours and its time to think freely – a lot of creative ideas happen when your body is working out and your mid is relaxed. I don't get sick nor feel "bad" stress because of this discipline. When I am interstate I pack my running gear and run around the beautiful rivers in each state.

### **I know that many leaders struggle with the concept of the imposter syndrome. Do you have any words of wisdom on this?**

As above. The imposter syndrome is a state of mind. Yes men suffer from it too but they "bluff" it better than women. They are better at "faking it until you make it". Do whatever improves your confidence because with improved confidence and self-belief you won't suffer from the imposter syndrome. You will feel comfortable in your own skin.

### **You have had a wonderful career so far. What would you say the highlight has been? And why? Why did you set up Behind Closed Doors? What has surprised you about that journey so far? What have you learnt that you didn't expect?**

With a huge passion for people development, establishing Behind Closed Doors and taking it nationally has realised my dreams and vision. I have been really surprised at the consistent positive responses and feedback I receive from both men and women. The businesswomen who join Behind Closed Doors really see value in having a "safe" environment to be open and honest with each other and the Facilitators, Program Directors and members all see the results of how the members grow personally and professionally.

The women in my team, the Facilitators and Program Directors around Australia are equally passionate about seeing women succeed. Having a national network of women supporting and encouraging each other, doing business with each other and introducing each other to their networks has been more successful than I envisioned. Seeing so many businesswomen grow in confidence, grow professionally and personally by receiving promotions, achieving Board roles, winning awards, growing their businesses is most rewarding. When women say in a public forum that "this is the most comfortable I have ever felt in my own skin"...then I know we have a successful niche offering.

Even when women leave the program they remain connected so we know that we have established a real Behind Closed Doors community. It's great to see women seeking out other members to transact business. They feel so comfortable networking and building long lasting relationships now yet on joining the program, networking was something they never invested their time in.



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### How would you describe your leadership style?

My leadership style is collaborative, challenging, tough but fair. I continually stretch and extend my team out of their comfort zones, make them accountable, give them full autonomy and responsibility and therefore I am proud when I see them grow both professionally and personally. I am flexible, trusting and respectful and I expect all of my team to do **their** best and work as a team.