



The Talent Whisperer

Leadership paradigms have changed in the last 10 years as businesses face the consequences of digital disruption, economic disarray and a changing list of employee demands. With the GFC still playing out, it is no longer business as usual. So how does a leader navigate this minefield? For **Dr. Cecily Moreton**, founder of Moreton Executive Coaching, this means consciously leading with a 21C mindset to retain and promote the brains and the best available talent. To survive and flourish in the twenty-first century leaders must change their minds, think in more conscious ways, discard old biases and open new doors in their businesses.

From a business family, and inspired by family leaders in medicine, agri-business and the power industry, Dr Cecily Moreton taught secondary and tertiary education before retraining as a psychologist working with hundreds of war veterans.

“Working with these men so they regained control of their minds and lives taught me a lot about how best to collaborate with good men at their worst and best. This undoubtedly helped me when I went on to become a business manager before establishing my own leadership consulting business,” Cecily says.

It becomes immediately apparent

upon meeting her that Cecily is a frontrunner in the field of Conscious Leadership. After a Vietnam veteran introduced her to Buddhist meditation (she did 6 ten-day silent meditation courses in a year which helped her recover from debilitating and career disrupting illness), she went on to do her doctoral research into how to shift good operational managers into real leaders. The result of hundreds of executive coaching sessions with 24 executive managers from Stanwell power generator and the University Co-op Bookshop, was her ground breaking thesis *Executive Coaching for Conscious Leadership*.

Working with executive man-

agers and teams of senior managers Cecily provides individual and group leadership development, for example to improve change management success. An example of individual executive career coaching was explored when *Australian Financial Review* sat down with Cecily to learn more about her groundbreaking advising strategies that are transforming the way that leaders are promoting and approaching the talent pool. Many CEOs see her regularly as a confidential sounding board who can meet them intellectually and get them thinking outside their squares – and past their pinch points.

Cecily is particularly adept

at cutting through the clutter to quickly read situations and identify obstacles and key areas for development. The difference, she says, between what she does and what other business and leadership coaches do stems from her ability to identify issues accurately and quickly. She reads people like accountants do spread sheets and—and here’s the crucial bit—she is an expert in human behaviour and behavioural change. This is what she was trained to do, and this training is apparent in her approach to advising: “Armed with a good understanding of the brain and decades of evidence-based practical skills and experience,” Cecily says, “I can boost helpful behaviours and reduce unhelpful behaviours. Working with a good systematic and measured approach over a dozen sessions, it is actually surprisingly easy bringing about desired leadership traits.”

Leadership coaching, like any mind and behaviour change relationship, depends on a foundation of trust, and building trust has long been a part of Cecily’s practice. Collaborative coaching with high powered, motivated managers is easier than counselling “opinionated, difficult, stropmy men with horrific nightmares... but by building a trust-based relationship, and applying an effective strategy, these veterans were able to sleep again. Success in turn deepens the bonds of trust. While business clients want better business results (which will help give a sound night’s sleep), the coaching process, particularly its foundation of trust, is the same.”

Thanks to the paradigm shift we’ve witnessed in the last decade, Dr Moreton’s messages about conscious leadership, innovation and bigger-picture thinking have taken on a new urgency. The entirely new 21C economic and social climate demands new kinds of leaders and new thinking and strategies. Those clinging most fiercely to old transactional models focused on operational aerodynamics and financial outcomes are struggling to remain relevant. As the paradigm began to shift, Cecily saw a dramatic uptick in the amount of executive retraining she was doing. She says, “Salaried managers were

focusing on their own KPIs, not on business impacts of national and global economics and politics”.

We don’t know what we don’t know. We often don’t recognise when our approach is not working until too late. As a big-picture executive coach Cecily was helping the Chief Executive Suite see they had a narrow field of vision and to explore what was outside their focus. “This is often a key pinch point, because with each bump in the road, I have seen organisations revert to older models, and then their unrecognised top talent leaves. Leadership development too is often heaved overboard in their uncertainty”. Cecily says that this is misguided. “It’s only by taking into account the massive social and business revolutions happening now that the future of the organisation can be guaranteed.”

In the last decade there has been both more employment insecurity and yet a more widespread demand for enlightened leadership. Today’s

employees expect much more of their employers than those of even a decade ago. This necessitates moving from transactional leadership modes to what Cecily calls conscious leadership to retain top talent. It’s about trusting relationships again. It demands a greater degree of sensitivity to the needs of staff members, and a concerted effort on the part of leaders to promote and recruit only those who could show that they understand 21C customers as well as 21C employees.

Cecily says that moving in this direction is a wise business decision, and there are mountains of research that support this. “These days,” she says, “we stick to the research and talk about the concrete benefits attached to hiring and fostering the kind of people who can demonstrate the kind of qualities that will make them excellent leaders, for example cognitive intelligence, learning agility, and empathy.”

“Businesses are missing out on a lot of top talent because they are not hiring and promoting from the whole talent pool. They are missing out on many stellar women. I want CEOs and Boards to see the top talent that is right in front of them, because they need this talent to succeed in the new global economy.”





We have to
think
with a
new mind

Albert Einstein

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This is not to say that those who do not display these qualities are unfit for leadership roles. Transactional leaders make effective managers. They can be organised, financially astute, highly practical and highly adept at delegation. But in the post-GFC world, there is a growing separation between good management qualities and good leadership qualities, and conscious leadership is about striking the balance between transactional, transformational, and transpersonal leadership. (See Moreton Executive's website to learn more about these three leadership stages). While people skills can get dropped when the financial pressure is on, nevertheless top leaders recognise that people-based skill sets, considerably more nuanced and complex today than they were even a decade ago, are essential to trust and business success.

Cecily says that when people describe today's most inspiring and successful leaders, "they are now using descriptors associated with highest-order transpersonal leadership. They assume relationship building should be a given, and go to words like wisdom, ethics, and global thinking. They are speaking of bold visionaries."

The organisations that are setting new post-GFC benchmarks are the ones that are able to combine transactional managers, insightful and empathic transformational leaders, and business driving global vision.

"Boards and executive teams grasping and delivering this balanced leadership at the top of the organisation is the foundation of conscious leadership." And right now conscious leaders in board rooms and executive teams are promoting top talent wherever they can find it.

To be a competitive economic power globally, Australia absolutely needs our sharpest minds in top roles, driving innovation and powering productivity and, crucially, speaking to market segments that have yet to be addressed in powerful ways. We need a new outlook that attracts the best thinkers and that means opening to greater diversity of culture and gender. This is not something that can be put on the shelf: "In my experience," says Cecily, "many businesses have been slow to grasp the urgency of the impact of the last eight years." In 2010 only 2 per cent of chief executives were women; only 3 per cent of boards were chaired by women; only 9.2 per cent of board members and 10.7 per cent of senior executives were women. There's been progress, but not as much as Cecily would like to see. Last year, women in the NSW public service made up only 32% of senior executive roles, but, as managers, they were outperforming men in most metrics.

It is human nature to trust and hire what is most familiar, but for decision makers that can be creating a pinch point.

Business as usual e.g. a predominantly male boardroom, is holding organisations in a 20C paradigm. In the post-GFC business climate, companies that most firmly grasp the nettle of disruption are surging ahead of their competitors. Business as usual is concerned with bailing out the boat; the new paradigm is repositioning the sails to catch the changing trade winds. Cecily says, "I want to see the best management and leadership in place in all businesses. I want to contribute to getting the brightest, most talented managers into executive roles, and many of these talented managers happen to be women. The women who make it to the executive level are usually exceptional. Businesses that keep these women from being promoted or keep them out of the selection

pool are doing themselves a disservice."

Globally, companies giving women the keys to the C-suite are outperforming their competitors. A 15-year study of Luxembourg banks found a 10 per cent increase in the proportion of women in the senior management ranks of a bank lifted its financial performance by more than 3 per cent per annum. And during the global financial crisis 2007 to 2009, that effect almost doubled. Cecily says that the trick is to get top talent past key Pinch Points, points where for example women, thanks largely to unidentified or unexpressed internal biases, are excluded from consideration. She coaches men to identify and support these stellar women past the pinch points for the benefit of their business, and she coaches women to prepare and position themselves to be ready push past the Pinch Point. And she coaches male executives to see their own biases for what they are, which leads them to promote and recruit even a few more talented women, making their teams and organisations much stronger in the process.

Five years ago, Cecily urged one COO in the electricity industry to trust his real knowledge and not succumb to pressure from his male peers. He decided to promote two outstanding women to executive roles. He ended up, she says, "trusting these women as much as he trusts men", to lead a major change program allowing the business to flourish.

Cecily has distilled her experience into programs that help people get past their pinch points. In 2016 Cecily is adding to her leadership programs, courses to help men and women promote smart women past their Pinch Points. Her upcoming book *Pearls at the Pinch Point* is intended as a practical road map to help decision makers and talented women help each other. "This year my extra mile is about helping talented women make a more substantial contribution. Research shows that when they do this, they improve the business." She wants Australian business leaders to realise that they're missing out on half the best brains that are available to them. "Better talent means better decisions and better returns." BFM