

Transcription - Denis Gambi Part 2

Welcome back. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and we're continuing our discussion with Denis Gambi. We're talking about the qualities that we see and enjoy in business leaders.

So when you're looking at the qualities that you see as ideal in business leaders and you find something, you find one or two that are ideal business leaders, do you gravitate towards where they're working?

You want that connection and you want to be a part of that potential success regardless of how hard that is going to be for you to do things when it's an industry that you're not conversant with or it's a physical location that you don't particularly want to be traveling to. What you value is the reward, whether it be personal or financial or whatever else you want, but it's that ability to assess that and say, you know what, this is actually worth giving a go.

Or you say, well now I'm going to go back in my box and I'm happy where I am and there's nothing wrong with that. They understand where their boundaries are and that's a good thing.

Now in your career so far, you worked for a number of organizations. Is there a difference between those organizations?

There's a lot of commonality, but there are a lot of differences in walking in to the organizations. One of the first things is, how does it function? What's its culture? How does it get things done? That's important for me because I like to achieve results. So I need to get an understanding of how they do that. And you need to also, in a large organization to understand politics, you can't alter it, it doesn't mean you necessarily have to always play along with it, but you need to at least have an appreciation. So it's that ability to work within that, I think that's really important. So yes, typically, there are many differences.

The one that sticks out in my mind is the cultural elements are really important. You don't get that in the first week or two, you really need to spend a good amount of time, even months to get to understand how it is you can work within an organization to actually make things happen and there are elements of culture, there are elements of operations about the behaviors and the values the organization lives by, there's those sort of things. Everyone will have a set of values to actually live by. It is ingrained in what they do. Does it allow me to understand why they do the things they do? Some will and some won't.

What sort of research do you do before you look at a new opportunity? Apart from the material publicly available, you can find someone who's currently working, who has worked there in the past because you want an understanding of why did they leave, maybe it was just that they had a great opportunity, maybe there's some issues with the organization that it would help knowing about. Certainly finding contacts within the organisation, that's to me probably the number one way to get a sense of the flavor of the organization, how it functions and what are some of the issues that potentially you might face.

So if you put yourself on the other side of the table and you're looking for a senior executive to come into the organization, is there a place in the recruitment process for them to come in and have a day to wander around and talk to people?

It's an interesting idea. I haven't seen it in a business sense, I've seen it in other arenas in a competitive sense, because I'm involved in some competition stuff and often we, as competitors, will be invited in before the competition to have a look at what other competitors are doing. The thinking behind it is that it gives you a sense of how much effort you need to put in, what the judges are going to be expecting. It also gives you a feeling of the venue itself. So the competition room and if you haven't been there before you get a bit more comfortable with where things are, it works both ways without you being on the spot. The closest I've gotten to that is in one position I went to work for, they had gone through a substantial amount of restructure and the person that I was dealing with looking to recruit to the role was going for, once we got to virtually the end point, they said, look, aren't you going to chat to the consultant who did a lot of work around the new structure? They provided me the reports that the consultant provided and gave me an opportunity to go through all that to see all the issues that they were facing. They were very, very well documented. Which again is something that's interesting for you to be able to consider the issues that you're going to face.

No, I haven't seen that in the past. Again, the only thing that comes close to it is if you do some form of testing, but that's very stylized, very clinical. It doesn't put you in to a position of knowing what the organisational is actually doing.

Your question was about the senior levels and my knowledge is the same as what you just covered. But in relation to that, we mentor high school final year students, a lot of organizations do that, the executives take on that mentoring role and in doing that, we bring them in to what we call the office towers and get

them to see what that looks like. So a global organization, whether it's a law firm, whether it's an accountancy firm, a bank and I was surprised that I didn't think about it before, but when we did do it, people were really appreciative. These students have not been in an office before and you just think, oh, you go past the building all the time, but you don't know what's like on the inside. And when you walk them through each floor and say, this is operations, this is where people deal with the clients, this is where the front counter is or whatever it is, it makes more sense to them.

So I guess there's room throughout that, particularly in the next stage that will be the graduates. You know, there's a lot of graduate programs and we could, before we picked the graduates, show them so they can choose whether they want to go to a company A, B or C.

But at the executive level, I like what happened with you and there's more room for that. And I think the question I was thinking and that's probably something that really needs a paradigm shift because industry itself has changed so much. You talked about it right at the beginning, why are we still doing this same process hanging on to this process because we're comfortable with it, because for 80% of the time it works? And if we don't get the right person, well, there's so many others out there, we'll just find the next one and we don't look at the cost involved of that change over of personnel.

At this level it can be costly in all sorts of ways. We don't spend sufficient time to actually assess that. Typically we go through multiple series of interviews and try to assess that during what is a completely unnatural way of selecting someone because no one's going to be talking generally about how they feel. The biggest change to recruitment in my time was that we've moved from just advertising to having selection criteria to asking applicants to address the selection criteria in their application. So when the selection criteria says must be able to work in a team, everyone says "I can work in a team". How do we change what we do to make that assessment relevant?

If we look at it broadly in terms of recruiting as a phrase, we start with kindergarten, they have an open day. So the kids can see what the schools like. They have a day where the kids stay there, so they see what it's like to be at school for a day. We do it with high schools, with universities that have open days, we do it as work experience with kids. Now I had a lolly shop for a long time and I'd have kids, they would be clientele and they'd say I'd really like to do my work experience here. It's very different when you're working here, I would say. You know, I'm not the nice lady behind the counter then but for them to see

in a week what it meant to be on the business side rather than the customer side and to have to deal with the customers as well, it often changed their minds, sometimes that it actually instilled in them a desire to do something that was along those lines and for others, it was just, I can't do this, I want to sit behind a screen, I don't want to talk to people for a week, I don't want to have to talk to people when I don't feel like it.

And so for me and for them, often I would look at them as potential part time employees as well, I invested a week worth of training in them. I wanted to see that there was some return for me as well as for them. So we do it in all of these stages, but when we get to middle to upper management, it's something that's hands off, we'll talk to them from behind the desk. I guess it is expected that we will do this on our own. It might be that we are considered old enough, mature enough and we have to assess the risk for ourself. But from, from the other side of the organization's perspective, I think it's probably more important in terms of ensuring you get the right cultural fit and how you do that through a series of three or 4 interviews. You have to spend a lot more time finding out about the history of the person and not just the referees that the person nominated. And that's always been tricky because when people apply for a job, they nominate a referee and you don't want to be talking to people where there's confidentiality issues.

You want to respect timing and confidentiality, but I guess there's no reason why organizations can't do what you mentioned as an individual. Talk to people who worked with you before, as you said when I'm going to look for work in an organization, ask someone who worked there or is working there now. So when you're engaging an individual, you could say (to yourself) has anybody I know through networks, worked with Denis or Fulyana or Kim? What were they like in real life? Not as the referee as such, but so we can see results. But as a person how do they behave? Doing that from people who worked with someone before, it's really good.

I worked with someone in a mentor capacity before and I asked, where do you go, how do you behave in periods of stress? What is your leadership style when the rubber hits the road and you're under stress and you're being pressured to deliver something, so forth. And that probably demonstrates the true underlying characteristics of individual. The reason I was looking at that with this person was to get that self awareness as to when those situations do come along, recognize how you behave.

You could ask that question at interview though. What what strategies do you

use? Because you normally as you said, you reverted to type under stress. So what do you normally do and give examples of that. For example, you know that if you're not in the right frame of mind, you don't initiate certain meetings or you reschedule certain meetings without inconveniencing others, but you want to be in top shape for a certain topic and it's okay to sort of have a distance and step back a bit until you are, because you want to project at the best for you, for the company and for your peace as well as the organization.

The question that I find works really well for me in that process is the superpower one. So you say to them, what if you were a superhero, what superpower would you like to have? And the thinking that goes behind it is often quite as revealing as the answer that they give because it's not a question that they're expecting, it's not a question that's been asked before necessarily unless I've interviewed them before, but it gives me a sense of how they think and often what they see as their shortcomings or areas that they would like to improve, that they perhaps don't see as useful enough. Or it will give me some other insight into the way they think basically. I like to ask what is the process and see what their reaction is.

Comparing different organizations, did you find size, local or global, made it easier or harder for decisions to be made? As a general rule it takes longer in one type of organization to another. I worked in a U. S. corporation, multinational, very large. It had distributed delegation if you like. So the regional centers were very influential. At the country level, so long as you're doing okay, all decisions were able to be made at the country level, once things were going well. Compare that to a large Aussie one, the organization was very bureaucratic, it took a long time to get decisions. Decision making process seemed to be really arduous. One should not generalize is what you're saying, it depends on the organization you're working in and the key that you gave us before, is understand the culture and the processes they have so that you can work with them and improve. Its really important to get that decision making process understood so you can see that it's going to help you.

Is it a question you'd ask at interview? Absolutely. Do you see that as a difference between industries so that you have one industry or one sector that is more bureaucratic than others? I can't actually comment as I haven't worked across that many others, only manufacturing and financial services (for the last 25 years). Earlier on I made a comment that at the time when I was working manufacturing and I made the switch across the financial services, there was no question in manufacturing at that time, the management processes, their management behaviors were far in advance of financial services. They had

spent many, many years, they'd been in business for a very long time looking at those sort of things. The way they actually progressed people through the organization was, it was very rare to actually sit in their roles for more than two or three years before you move into another and they actually purposely targeted individual's capability and caliber in order to move them through the various parts of the business. So a very broad grounding and then to see whether they actually had true leadership potential. So it was a very, at that time, quite a while ago now, very purpose built approach to people moving through the business.

Within the financial services sector then, have you seen a change in leadership skills, business leadership skills? Absolutely. It has changed in some ways and in others it hasn't changed at all. So again, I know it's horses for courses, there are some organizations that are very good at it and are able to take in new ideas and new things and able to take those and really make a success of it. The older styles still survive and still find people whose skill set matches their approach.

I think sometimes, for people listening, we don't want to make it appear as though we're saying this is the set of skills because in your industry, you won't get ahead in any other way. We still want to be able to recognize that they've got a skill set that might fit somewhere that they haven't thought of.

Do you think for a personal development and growth, is it better to work for more than one organization than just work for the one? Having the opportunity to go and experience another culture, another way of doing things is incredibly valuable. I think there's a certain level of practicality and pragmatism that has come along with that so you're able to adapt literally to new environments. Having said that, you need depth of experience within a particular business as well. I don't think one particular way of doing things is always right. So having both mix I think is very helpful. What you want is those who are well experienced. Those who have been around for some time. Those who want to see how it works and then you inject that fresh thinking that hopefully those people who have had the diversity of experience in organisations, if you can bring those two things together, is very powerful.

We are almost at the end of the time, is there anything that we haven't yet covered in terms of business skills or places you've worked that is worth mentioning? Leadership as a topic you can talk about for a very, very long time and obviously a lot of people do. The thing I was going to say was I think along with changing styles of leadership and that we see old styles and new styles, I think the awareness of the importance of leadership at least, in financial services. I've seen that change over the past 25 years, the awareness of its

importance, not just at the most senior level, but down through the ranks. And identifying leaders? Definitely and I think it's that identifying where, probably the mentoring and coaching as well, you see a big difference. I think we've talked previously about if we had a vision for ourselves, we looked for mentors, we didn't use the word, that we had coaches and we had mentors and role models.

So that's another question that we generally ask our guests, what do you see is the difference between mentoring and coaching? And then the second part of that question is - a structured mentoring program or unstructured? Horses for courses. In fact, I've got a particular instance right now where unstructured is helping that individual. There are different levels of instruction, there are different levels of formality. At one end of the spectrum, I think there's a real need for a structured mentoring and the other for those people who are a little bit more fluid, who are a little bit more dynamic or maybe don't really know their path, something a little bit more informal, unstructured is suitable.

So the difference to coaching is something specific. If you're doing it to actually develop a particular skill set or whatever happens to be, it's very specific in its nature, it is for a particular purpose. Mentoring to me can be very broad and typically in the mentoring relationships that I've had, you know, the first few meetings you're dealing with topics literally from one end of the work spectrum to the other. In time you may zero in on something, but typically you will then come back out and deal with some other aspect of your life, whether it be your work will be personal, financial, spiritual, whatever happens to be.

So mentoring to me can be far broader and it really depends on where the individual is at that time of their life.

Thank you for your time today, Denis, we've certainly covered a range of ideas and thoughts. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, we've been talking with Denis Gambi and this is Inside Exec.