



'Simon Says'

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Great leaders epitomise the change they wish to create. An Interview with Dr Penny Flett – CEO of Brightwater Care Group.



Dr Penny Flett,
CEO Brightwater
Care Group

I recently had the pleasure of interviewing Dr Penny Flett; CEO of Brightwater Care Group, about her views and successes on managing industry innovation and change. As we rapidly draw towards the end of 2013 I reflect on a year that has represented substantial challenges for many businesses, contrasted with significant growth opportunities for those who have been brave and savvy enough to identify and

embrace new ways of doing things. It seems like a good time to celebrate a 2013 success story and inspire those who may be looking for a catalyst to change.

As an organisation that provides aged care and disability services in the local communities in which it operates, Brightwater's track record of industry change and organisational growth alone is impressive. Brightwater was the first organisation to introduce residential aged care as we know it today to Western Australia. Where previously the aged had few options but to be cared for collectively in sterile institutions, thankfully in Australia these days, the approach to health and the aged is far more holistic; offering tailored, coordinated and multidisciplinary care solutions in a range of settings.

Even more impressive has been the establishment of Brightwater Oats Street; a world first purpose built rehabilitation facility designed to assist those with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) to relearn life skills. This project was born out of Penny's personal observations that young people with ABI were most often placed in aged care facilities due to the complete absence of alternative specialised care and support services required for people with brain injuries. Penny noticed that their recovery on many occasions defied early bleak medical diagnosis regarding the extent of potential recovery. It was clear that a high quality longer term solution was needed and Penny, with the strong support of her Board of Directors and her team, set about achieving it.

Penny's list of personal accolades over her career is considerable and includes being awarded the Telstra Business Woman of the Year Award, the Centenary Medal for services to aged and disabled, a National Aged and Community Service Award for Excellence and WA Australian of the Year.

Although these awards are impressive, it is clear from talking to Penny that they are more a recognition of a philosophy. Penny says; "It is about having an unwavering commitment to making things better for your clients; putting the best interests of your clients first above all else."

So with this track record, I was keen to share Penny's well-honed and practiced strategies for managing industry innovation and change. Her advice is frank and practical:

1. Trust it will work.

If you are putting your clients improved wellbeing at the heart of the transformation then you cannot fail.

2. Have the courage to think beyond the now.

Using a combination of your industry knowledge and intuition to envisage a different way.

3. Surround yourself with exceptional people.

Recruit the right people and give them the autonomy and encouragement to fulfill their potential.

4. Be aware that innovation in its infancy can be lonely.

It is only at the point that an idea is seen to be working that it reaches collective acceptance.

5. There is a tipping point when change gets traction.

Up until this point it is a big persuasion piece. Expect, anticipate and plan for resistance.

6. Start with the thin edge of the wedge.

Make sure you target small wins early to build momentum for the change effort.

What is most apparent when you spend time with Penny is her belief and passion in what she does and a sense that anything is possible. And Penny's final advice to aspiring change leaders?

"If you are prepared to think beyond the now and surround yourself with exceptional teams of people to ensure you deliver on your promise, you cannot help but make a profound impact on your industry."

From the team at Edward George, our very best wishes for the festive season and may you all embrace the great opportunities that present themselves in 2014.



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Simon Stibbs is the Managing Director of Edward George Pty Ltd.