

## Welcome

As we're recording this program, this panel discussion it's near the beginning of 2009 and Australians are just starting to feel the impact of the financial tidal wave that's already swept through the USA, Europe and Asia. We can say that is not lapping at our feet and its roaring in with the power of a tsunami. Already thousands of Australians have lost their jobs, not just in the financial sector which felt the first effect. But now the ripple effect is starting to show in the mining sector, in retail and elsewhere as well.

Some organizations are struggling, many employees are uncertain and fearful about their future, and the State and Federal government seem powerless to stop it or even slow it down.

Leading economic forecaster Access Economics says, "Batten the hatches, this is not just a recession this is the sharpest deceleration Australia's economy has ever seen."

So with that as a cheery back drop, what does this mean for employees and their managers and leaders? We would all *like* to be happy, optimistic and productive and engaged at work, but I wonder is that a luxury or a fantasy now? Or is there even some hope and opportunity for those who do things differently?

To discuss these issues and offer some options and solutions I'm joined today by a panel of four leading experts in employee engagement and productivity.

Maree Harris is a coach and facilitator. She leads the way in helping leaders and managers engage, motivate and empower their people, particularly in these challenging times. She believes they should be proactive, resilient and empowered so that we can find opportunity and possibility where others are perhaps only seeing crisis and gloom, so welcome Maree.

**Maree:** Thanks Gihan.

David Koutsoukis is a team development expert. He partners with organizations to improve their productivity and profit. He particularly works with their teams, and he helps them attract and retain a focused engaged and capably led workforce. And he helps them build positive, productive and high performing teams. Hi David.

**David:** Hi Gihan and hello everyone.

Carla Frayne is a consultant psychologist. She knows what makes people tick and how to get the best from them. She's an expert in employee

wellbeing and engagement. She is passionate about creating positive and safe workplaces. Welcome Carla.

**Carla:** Thank you Gihan and welcome everybody.

And finally, last but not least, Alicia Curtis is a speaker, consultant and mentor who helps leaders to manage and retain their Generation Y employees effectively. She's a Gen Y leader herself and she's got practical experience as well as academic experience, with a Masters in Leadership and Management from Curtin University where she researched employee engagement of young professionals. Welcome Alicia.

**Alicia:** Thank you and hello.



Well we've got this great group of minds around this panel today. We're going to talk about some of the expertise and I'll ask you to share some of the expertise that you have.

## Assessing the Mood

But let's start with what is going on? What are the things you're noticing around the water coolers and board rooms with your clients and people that you're talking to?

So if we're talking about employee engagement I think we'll all agree that an engaged employees are more productive and effective. We'll take that for granted. But if I can start with you Carla – I'm curious whether you think this whole idea of employee engagement is even more important now then ever before?

**Carla:** I think it is really, really vital for an organization sustainability through this turbulent time. From the perspective of my clients the mood seems to be fairly optimistic. So far I'm not seeing that the current issues have really impacted upon the employees at work other than through their personal losses, their super investments and also some older retired worker reapplying for work.

Most are thinking that the downturn is not something that will generally affect their workplace. We're in for a rough time but we will

recover. So there is a hope there. And some organizations are actually seeing benefits. One of my organizations benefited from another company jumping gun probably a little bit too soon and shedding their employees. This company actually picked up their employees and now the other contract has just won back a contract and are now facing labor shortages. So it's a bit of a mixture across the board from what I'm seeing in my work.

That is quite an optimistic view Carla and I'm pleased to hear that some people are actually experiencing that. What is your take on that, Maree? Are you seeing the same thing or is it a different perception among the people that you deal with?

**Maree:** I'm not seeing as an alarmist position as you put across in the beginning amongst my clients Gihan. I suppose the biggest thing I'm seeing is a lot of caution and people delaying making decisions about things and putting things on hold and waiting to see. Now this is having repercussions. For example, I've lost 2 contracts that were just about signed because this all came along and they've told me we're not completely stopping this but we're not going to do anything just yet.

We had a mining manufacturing company that manufactures material for the mining industry say exactly that. They've had to put off 5 staff in our town just this week because not the contracts have been cancelled but they're just waiting to see what is going to happen. So that is what I'm seeing both right across a lot of industries. And I rang around some of my contacts this morning to see what was happening and over our way that is the general mood.

So it's not desperate by any means. There is still some hope there.

Again that seems to be an echo of some cautious optimism out there.

David, you work with senior leaders who perhaps have control of the whole organization as well as managers who have perhaps control over certain areas. And managers are perhaps the most vulnerable because they're middle management and they're possibly the ones who are seen as the easiest to cut in these sorts of tough times. What's your perception of what they're going through at the moment?

**David:** Certainly managers are feeling the pressure at the moment and one of the biggest pressures they're feeling is the fact that they actually have to let people go, let alone the fact that they may be let go themselves. I'm finding people struggling with that fact.

And the responses I'm getting are from managers and employees as well are about as diverse as the people I work with in teams. One of

the things I do with teams is work through personalities and look at how people are different. And the ranges of responses I'm getting are from pessimistic to "business as usual" to really optimistic about the whole situation. But I think there is a sombre mood at the moment. A bit like New Year's Eve celebrations – I believe New Year's Eve celebrations were very sombre this year; we didn't have the same amount of activities and problems that occur with New Year's Eve. So it's more sombre. So the atmosphere in the work place is a little bit like that.

But some places I'm actually finding that they're buoyant about the whole situation. Like places that aren't affected by the economic downturn like education and some government. They're actually happy because interest rates are going down and the fuel prices are going down and they're actually going to have a better standard of living except for those people who wanted to retire in the next couple of years. A real wide range of responses.

Yeah that does particularly affect the baby boomers who are coming to the end of their working lives and perhaps looking forward to retirement. So let's turn to the other end of the working spectrum. Alicia Curtis, you work with Gen Y people and there is this perception, this stereotype of Gen Y's which I know you are passionately trying to overcome. But there is this perception that they're disloyal, they're flighty, they don't have responsibility, they don't have commitment. And also that the current economic situation is going to strike them harder than anybody else and they won't know what hit them.

I guess you and I feel that Gen Y's aren't as naïve and silly as that. But what is the perception you're getting from the people you work with and your colleagues?

**Alicia:** I think a lot of young people are not feeling the effects of the downturn as yet but know that it is something they might have to deal with in the future. There is cautious optimism and I think they probably describe themselves as OK. But they are actually feeling a lot of pressure for their parents, because they're seeing their parents who are looking to maybe retire in the next 5 years, they're seeing their superannuation go down; they're looking at their own parents' businesses or their employment opportunities going down too.

So it's affecting them in that way as well. But I think it's about having...they're seeing themselves as great adapters and ones that love change. So this is not necessarily seen as a real pressure for them to have to deal with right at the moment.

Do you think in your opinion they just don't realize how bad things can possibly be given that they possibly are the one demographic group who haven't been through this before?

**Alicia:** I think there will definitely be new skills that they will have to develop. If they're having to stay at jobs a little bit longer than they may have done in the past, this might actually challenge them to maybe work through different job relationships a bit more than they have in the past. They've also got to maybe keep focused on fewer job projects than they may have done in the past. So there will be new skills that they will have to learn but also it gives them a great opportunity to use these companies to innovate new solutions in these tougher economic times because they are ones that do love creative thinking and love thinking outside the square.

So I wouldn't just write them off because they haven't gone through a recession before either.

That is an interesting way of looking at it, isn't it? It's like sort of saying the Gen Y's are not the problem, and perhaps they could be the solution to the problem.

**Alicia:** Definitely and I think we've got to look at that in our whole work context. Hopefully these economic times will bring generations together rather than actually have them working against each other in the workplaces. I mean when the first downturn came through a lot of blogs that were coming out were managers and leaders that were actually saying these economic times are great because these Gen Y's will have to appreciate their jobs and stop job hopping so much. So let's actually try and work together on coming up with solutions for these tough times rather than actually have the generations working against each other.

## Is History Repeating Itself?

For those of us who are old enough to remember in our work life going through a recession, what is your perception how this downturn in Australia – it's not yet officially a recession – compares to some of the other dips we've had in the economy in the past?

**Maree:** I'm hoping Gihan that we might have learned something from the last downturn. I feel certain here in Victoria that some of the ways that it was handled has had long lasting repercussion in the workplace. For example, I think our Premier Jeff Kennett, he at that time he slashed 50,000 public service jobs and created a whole new restructured workplace but did not give his new managers and leaders

in that workplace any training or support in how they were to negotiate that new environment.

And I'm hoping that what might happen this time is that we might be better able to realize – and this fits in very much with our topic today – that leaders and managers and organizations might engage their workers more in managing this recession together as a team, rather than the managers and leaders doing what they have to do and creating very strong “them and us” environments. They'll provide training and support and really engage their workers in working through this together.

That really supports and enforces Alicia's point as well doesn't it?

**Maree:** Yes.

**Carla:** I agree with that Maree and I think that's very important that we do learn from the past. Having seen some organizations and how they've handled the people aspects, a lot of organizations during tight times go to focus back on the production aspect but that is not part of being totally sustainable for the future. They need to also look at not just the financials and environmental; they need to really look at the people. And it's about how they do it and that is what leads to longer term viability to the organizations is how the situation is managed.

In any kind of process it's all in how it's managed that creates the satisfaction even if the outcome is not what people want. As long as people have been consulted, any changes are managed correctly and consultatively and people have long memories and they do remember back to the earlier recession and how the organizations treated people at the time. I think it's really important now more so than ever that people organizations, managers, leaders, pay attention to the people aspects of their business and really, really keep focused on that we need to promote employee engagement.

**Maree:** I wonder if we're in a very different situation this time. The whole economic structure of society is being challenged by this economic crisis. And I wonder if we're actually in a transition phase at the moment? That we're never ever going to go back to where we were and we need a totally different way of processing what we're going through at the moment if it is transition. We're going to come out the end with something quite different perhaps.

I think last time we went through it and we came back to where we were and that's what we're aiming to do come back, to get back to equilibrium again and I think the question this time is, is that going to happen or are we going to end up with a totally different way of operating economically?

**Alicia:** I don't think we can afford to return to the status quo. I think like anything in today's changing world that organizations and the way we do things needs to keep evolving. I think we need to come back to what are the things that keep organizations viable. And it comes down to your people assets.

**David:** And I would agree with Maree that there is no past like this and that's what many people are saying to me, there is no past like this. We've talked about cycles and so on. One thing I do hear people saying is we're in it for the long haul and I don't hear many people saying it's going to be over soon and this is part of a cycle. When you think about it we haven't had the situation where properties have gone down, shares have gone down, interest rates have all gone down at the same time.

And because in this information age people aren't being kept in the dark and companies haven't had time to regroup and refinance and all that kind of thing. So I think that's why we've been hit so hard.

The other thing is for some people there is no past. I mean there is no past like this. This is the first time they've experienced this downturn and in an employment transition program I've been doing with some clients to help, there are actually people who are incredulous about, "How can they let me go?" "How can they just sack me?" "How does this happen?" So we are facing different times.

## It's Not Just About Money

Alicia, let me pick up on this conversation about how things are going to be different. One of the things that Gen Y does – one of the things you speak about and one of their drivers – is they work for meaning and not just money. In other words, they won't be engaged unless they're jobs give them personal satisfaction as well.

I can understand that in the long term vision but is that realistic? Is it a luxury that we just can't afford in the current economy? And will the Gen Y's have to give up some of that quest for meaning and just feel lucky they have a job at all?

**Alicia:** I think what is really important in these times is that organizations really align strengths with their objectives. So even if it's something they may not be overly passionate about at least if they can align something that they can do really well and actually work towards in these times, if they can align that with their projects I think they'll feel more fulfilled with their work.

I think there are a lot of ways. We've all heard about the demands of Generation Y over the recent years, and what they're demanding in the workplace, but I think it actually is going to be a plus for businesses at the moment because one of the things that they don't look for as their number 1 or 2 incentive is cash incentives. They are actually looking for other incentives which businesses will be able to easily provide to them in tougher economic times. Things like regular feedback, recognition of their good work, having a great social network within their workplace. These are all things that not necessarily hit the bottom line very heavily but can easily be done by organizations.

Great. Maree you have this beautiful story that I know you've told in the past about a manager who did manage to do something very simple that actually had a huge impact on their team's productivity.

**Maree:** Oh yes, I think it's a good story because it's about engagement that doesn't cost money and it only costs a little bit of time. And it was actually a colleague of mine, he was coaching a CEO of a large manufacturing company and the CEO was lamenting the low morale in his organization. And the colleague began talking with him about ideas for engaging his people and particularly big ideas about things like an employee engagement program and it became apparent that there was no money for anything of that size.

The CEO was extremely frustrated and the interesting thing is he didn't see any connection really between the low company morale and disengaged people that were there. All he could say to the CEO was but I've got 700 widgets I have to product every day, and I haven't got time for all this soft fuzzy sort of stuff. But as the coaching proceeded my colleague said to him, "Could you find 15 minutes a day to turn your company around?" He said, "Oh yeah I could that." He said, "What I want you to do is, I want you to instead of walking directly from your car into your office without going through your factory, I want you to walk through your factory every morning and spend 15 minutes each day interacting with your employees. I want you to do it for a month and then we'll talk again." Oh he could easily do that.

So he did that and literally within a week or so the morale of that company began to change. When my colleague went back after a month the CEO was a very different person and the morale in the organization was significantly improved.

I think that goes to show that there is a real risk in the present situation that companies and organizations think drastically, they think the only way we can manage this downturn is to lay off staff, for example. And they'll do drastic things when in fact there is a whole

range of little things like that that cost no money at all that can make a radical difference.

David, if I can pick up on that same theme, I know that some of the programs that you implement are short to medium term but some of them are long term programs. But you're a big believer in giving people simple practical things they can put into place immediately. It's like saying small hinges can open big doors. What are some of the things that you would recommend that people do in this current economic climate that are – as Alicia said, non-cash incentives; or as Maree said, just simple things you can do?

**David:** That works on a number of levels. Going back to Alicia's point earlier on about meaningful work, one little technique I've heard used successfully by Max Hitchens, which I know you know Gihan, and we're talking about meaningful work. What Max does is actually gets his employees in and he asks them, "What are 3 of your personal goals?" So they write down their 3 personal goals and he says, "I'll do everything I can to help you achieve your personal goals." That might be to put money aside to save up for a car; it might be to give them advice about how they can advance their career; and so on.

So I call that the 3 goal trick and I think it's a good way of engaging people to get in touch with their personal goals and so their work is actually congruent and helping them achieve their life goals, which of course is very important for engagement.

In terms of Maree's comments about relationships, I couldn't agree more. In fact, a colleague coined a saying that relationships are the foundation of all achievement and I couldn't agree more with that one. In fact, when I work with teams I talk about the team spirit or the team culture or the company's spirit if you like. It's like the force in Star Wars. I mean the good side of the force and the dark side of the force and people's attitudes and actions are actually contributing to either the good side or the dark side.

I think in these turbulent times people can subconsciously be contributing to the dark side and having a negative effect on morale. So I say to people think about the good side and work on your relationships at 2 levels, like an individual level and just the fact that you walk in with a smile and an exorbitant greeting can have a huge effect on morale as opposed to coming in with a long face and talking things down.

Another good technique I've seen people use and I try to use, in everyday use every single person's name in your workplace.

Another thing I've heard of is actually the walk and talk. So instead of going to someone's office and saying, "We need to have a 10 minute chat can you sit down and talk now?", people actually get up and walk and they often find with guys especially that just that process of walking can open people up.

So I like to tell people to "Go APE", which is accumulate positive encounters. I believe that if we accumulate positive encounters in workplaces we can actually contribute to the good side of the force, which then engages people and hopefully increases their productivity and profit.

Brilliant and Carla I know you're passionate about employing engagement as well and creating positive workplaces. What are some of the things you'd recommend to your clients and colleagues about creating a positive environment in a workplace even when sometimes the external circumstances are a little bit negative?

**Carla:** I think one of the things that I notice with organizations is where they have a positive workplace culture rather than a toxic workplace culture, people are more engaged, people find more meaning. And at the very foundation of that is organizational leaders and managers having asset based thinking rather than focusing on the deficits. And it might be doom and gloom outside but I think managers being supportive of employees and employees feeling supported by the organization and the culture.

I'm finding companies such as BHP are still keen to implement key support systems for low cost investment to ensure workers are supported by trained colleagues. Particularly when there may be stress in their own interpersonal lives. Wellness programs, employee assisted counseling; they're all strategies that promote engagement but also look out for the people that you have got.

And as David said, I love positivity. Positive thoughts have been found to be 100 times more powerful than negative ones. Great organizations, great leaders they're not created during the boom times, they happen through having a positive attitude and confidence during the really turbulent times. I sort of liken it to, there are a lot of planes flying around at the moment and lots of pilots flying those planes. But the only one that we can all recall is the man positively took the plane down and landed on the Hudson River having full confidence in his skills and abilities. And I think that's how we need to look at the situation.

There is an old Buddhist saying, "Where thoughts go energy will flow", and if you see this all as a crisis and believe in the doom and gloom

then this is what I think you're going to attract. So I think if organizations and leaders see this as a great opportunity that their only limits are by their own thoughts and they also give Gen Y's a chance to share some of that great creativity I think we will have a positive future.

I think like Maree said we need flexibility. That we don't just see it as it affects all the jobs but see it as redeployment opportunities; reduced hours rather than redundancy. I think like the Department of Health at the moment is looking to create a really great set of initiatives around work life balance. I think there are lots of things that organizations can do.

My other one that I'm passionate about is risk management. People in the workplace could be feeling stressed, depressed and anxious which is an impact on the company in terms of interpersonal conflict and overall risk in terms of safety. If you're focused on what has happened to your super, somebody in your family is out of work, you're not going to be concentrating on the job. And we know that when people aren't concentrating on the job they've got other worries. There is more risk for accidents and potentially fatalities. So I think training initiatives and stress and dealing with difficulties, supervisory skills but also overcoming adversity all pulling together positively to try and forge our way through to the future and overcome this difficult time.

## Generation Y and Inspiring Leadership

There seems to be some common themes coming through and Alicia I want to pick up on something you said earlier that not only the Gen Y's but I guess everyone wants regular feedback and that is something an organization can give easily and cheaply. But I guess from the Gen Y's viewpoint, given that they are the communication generation, is that it's one of their key attributes. The regular feedback doesn't necessarily only mean managers giving the Gen Y's feedback. But it can also be being more accepting of the feedback that management and leaders get from the Gen Y's couldn't it?

**Alicia:** I think partnerships are needed in the workplace and we have to utilize each other's strengths. And Gen Y's have a love of challenges and they are great problem solvers, great innovators. They like to think outside the box. So utilizing that strength of Gen Y in these times not only allows you to come up with new solutions but they feel involved. They don't feel micromanaged. They feel that they're a part of the team and they have something to offer, which is what they're looking for in workplaces. They're looking to be respected for the

strengths they can bring as well as helping the organization prosper in these times.

And Gen Y's have other strengths that can be harnessed during these times too. They're great multitaskers. They're always known as doing 3 things at once. So give them that variety, give them different challenges they can set aside some time to do as well as doing their normal work.

I suppose in these times businesses are going to have to be flexible; they're going to have to change and adapt. Often Gen Y's are eager to move into different roles, different projects even different countries. So those are opportunities you can give your Gen Y's to get the most out of them in these times.

**Maree:** I have 3 Gen Y children, when this all happened my husband and I took that attitude you were talking about originally, "Oh, this is really going to knock them about. They lived in an age of prosperity and since they left school everything has been wonderful and how they're going to handle all of this?" And we've been amazed at how resilient they are. One has lost his job and he just bounced back and got another one. And one of my daughters lost her job and jumped at the opportunity of having a part time one so that she could do something else that she's always wanted to do in the part. They've been very positive and energized really by it. It's had the exact opposite effect we expected it to have on them.

**Alicia:** Yes that's right. That is what has been said and what I'm seeing right at the moment. They're obviously great at adapting to changing conditions. So this is not anything new to them. And if they do lose their jobs they're happier to actually work multiple jobs if necessary to get that meaning out of the work but also to survive these times.

But they are looking for longer tenures with employers who treat them well as well. So I mean it's not something that they necessarily all want to do is job hop and change jobs every 5 minutes. So I think all the employee engagements everybody has talked about today, they are looking for in their leaders, they're watching their senior managers, their leadership within their organizations very carefully right at the moment. They're looking for inspiring leaders. And if organizations can provide those inspiring leaders at this time, they will actually become very loyal to the company.

## Leadership in Tough Circumstances

Maree, actually I want to ask you about that because Alicia mentioned the phrase inspiring leaders and I guess leadership is going to be one of the most important characteristics that are going to lead us through these difficult times. I wonder whether you have any practical tips for leaders who are perhaps quite good leaders and doing the right sort of things, but now are under financial and economic pressure, some of those things that are the soft skills are the easiest ones to let fall by the wayside and they may not even realize they're doing it but they're doing it. I wonder what you would say to those sorts of leaders, while you're doing such a good job how do you continue doing such a good job in these tough times?

**Maree:** Gihan, I actually had drawn up a list of 6 or 7 things that I think our leaders need to be doing. They need to focus on creating a new psychological contract with their people that focuses on their relationship with them. I really like that idea of psychological contract because it's a two-way thing. Like make a promise, we will look after you in these tough times if you will look after our organization. Or we will look after you and make your job and life more meaningful if you will bring your hearts and minds to our organization. Those sorts of contracts we make. Calling on them to work with you not just for you through these times. And to be open and transparent about their new agenda that they share the new agenda and the challenges of it with their workforce.

To be very clear about what their expectations are of their workforce and to get them aligned with that new agenda. And then to communicate, listen, communicate, listen, communicate, listen that that is absolutely crucial. I think Alicia has been particularly stressing that with the Gen Y that that communication needs to happen and they need to change. But I think it's across all age levels and the diversity of the workforce.

David I'll ask you a similar question because I know that you place a great emphasis on something you've already mentioned, relationships and quality workplace relationships. I guess one of the key foundational principles of relationships is trust. In good economic times it makes sense and it's easy to build key workplace relationships. But what happens when the relationships is a little bit less trusted, not because the people themselves don't have the right intentions but because people just realize that sometime in 6 months time or shorter they might be losing their jobs and not because their manager has it in for them but because the economy is tough? How do leaders and managers keep building the trust and keep people going on track and keep people to the psychological contract that Maree is talking about?

**David:** Yes I like the idea of Maree's psychological contract, because it gets people thinking with a positive attitude. And as far as I'm concerned the most important thing we can have in these times is the positive attitude. We're talking about positive futures and we've all possibly heard of the law of attraction, whatever you're thinking and feeling plus your actions is creating your future. So if we can focus on that positive future and the expectation that relationships are going to be strong, I think we'll be heading in the right direction.

Interestingly enough when I worked in the past I have noticed that places that are doing it pretty tough, you know sometimes in remote regions or they've got a fairly tough clientele, often the staff actually get together and there is a high degree of trust because they sort of have to bind together in tough times. So I'm actually noticing that in some workplaces also where people are becoming more cohesive because of these tough times.

But in terms of maintaining that trust and building that trust I think it works on two levels. I think one as leaders we need to continue to just do the little things, that little private verbal praise. Just pop into someone's office and say you're doing a good job and just keep up that little stuff. But I think it's also important that we have some kind of strategic process in there so we don't lose track of the fact that we need to continue doing what we're doing.

One of the things I work through with teams is what I call a positive team culture program. It goes through a number of stages where you assess what is going on, you get people involved, you have some learning programs, you plan to get some action in. and importantly you monitor the progress to see where you're going and then evaluate the program to see whether it's worked well. But the important thing is the process of maintenance and renewal because relationships don't just happen with a one day team event. If we have some kind of process where we continue to monitor morale and relationships and so on I think we're going to be a lot more successful in building those relationships and getting that trust.

## **Is Long Term Sustainability Possible?**

This is interesting because it leads me onto something else that really interests me in today's tough economy is this balance between short term necessity and long term sustainability. For example, I read something by ANZ Chief Economist Saul Eslake where he was saying that smart organizations will actually engage in what he calls "talent hoarding". So rather than cutting staff they'll hold onto them knowing they can take

advantage of the opportunities that are definitely going to come around in the future.

That kind of makes sense if you're looking at the long term vision. And a lot of our discussion so far has been about that. But what employees and managers who think they just can't afford to wait for things to turn around? So Alicia, if I can ask you first, what are Gen Y employees thinking? Are they going to be quick to jump ship if they see the organizations struggling? If so, what can managers and leaders do about that to encourage them to hang around and stick around and help out?

**Alicia:** I think one thing we don't often recognize about Generation Y is that they are actually looking for longer employment opportunities. They don't necessarily want to job hop. The reasons why they job hop is mainly because they find inspiring leaders in other organizations who are willing to give them the time to sit down with them, give them the mentoring that they need to develop their skills and knowledge to feel like they're actually making a difference in the roles they're providing in the workplaces.

I think what they're looking for at the moment is honesty. They're looking for leaders who will be up front with them. They have no hesitation with leaders telling them that they don't have particular skills or knowledge that they might need but they actually appreciate that and actually look for direction from their leaders as to what they need to do to overcome that.

So I think what leaders and managers can do right at the moment is just to be very up front with their teams. Let them know what is going on and what the new direction is or the new goals for their teams. So they can actually feel somewhat secure about their futures as well and actually move forward onto more solutions based thinking rather than telling their Gen Y colleague that they're not getting much out of this organization anymore.

Specifically, Alicia, I was going to ask you that question and you brought it up about honesty. So do you think that a manager or leader who is a bit uncertain themselves is better off being honest and saying to their team, "We don't know, just hang in with us and we'll tell you as much as we know as soon as we know it"? Or do you think that is going to scare them off? And I think you've given the answer but I would like to confirm that.

**Alicia:** I think they'll get a lot more credibility if they're honest and they're willing to let the Gen Y's know exactly what they can expect. I mean one of the examples I often give is about career development and management. Often in performance reviews manager will say, "Yes, yes, yes, you can do this, that and the other", and then nothing

happens. And that's the worst thing that can happen. If you're up front with the younger employee and say, "Look, times are tough right at the moment and you can only have this maybe career development activity for this quarter and then we'll work on other things that you want to work on in the future", you'll get so much more loyalty out of that young person instead of saying, "Yes we can do that" or maybe even the opposite, "No definitely not; end of discussion."

So I think engaging them in that conversation and letting them know what's possible but letting them know in a caring way and that they're actually looking out for them and looking at maybe the non-cash incentives that they can do instead. So perhaps mentoring within the organization, other sorts of feedback mechanisms and just giving them that recognition for the achievements they've had so far.

Carla you're a big believe in long term sustainability. So what is your take on the balance between having to make short term tough decisions while still keeping an eye on things sustainable in the long term?

**Carla:** I think it all comes down to – as Alicia has just mentioned and I know David and Maree have said – I think it comes down to relationships. I think it comes down to manager and leaders being people, understanding that these are times which are uncertain which nobody possibly may have the answer immediately. And communicating that, being open with people and I think creating cultures of support where managers and all employees walk the talk of the values such as respect and integrity and looking out for each other, keeping that communication open.

And I think also thinking that you have got a future. I believe if you feel that you have a future and start to look at the short term strategies you need to implement but keep that future in mind constantly. I think that is the way forward for most organizations being sustainable.

## Getting Help

Maree, I asked you a question earlier about what good leaders can do to continue to remain good and remain strong in this tough time. Now what about leaders and managers who know and are willing to admit to themselves that perhaps they haven't been the best they could be in terms of leading and managing teams and perhaps it's because they've been going through strong times and booms and they've been able to get by, their people have been happy, optimistic and positive without necessarily requiring their managers to do the right sort of things.

Now when things are tough, what can the manager who perhaps doesn't have the full trust and hasn't built up the relationships with their team, what can they do to start building it up without coming across as fake and artificial?

**Maree:** First of all they have to be able to acknowledge that they haven't got the skills to handle what is happening at the present time. I think this is where coaching or mentoring comes into its own in this present time.

I was going to ask David this actually – or well, everybody. We've been talking a lot about these relationships and if organizations can create these positive engaged relationships they will be more likely to ride through this crisis. But my concern is I wonder how many managers and leaders and CEO's actually have these required skills, these people skills, these relationship skills, interpersonal communication skills to be able to engage their employees during these times? I think if they haven't got it they are in for some really tough times because they are essential leadership skills that they actually need.

First of all, they need to recognize that they haven't got them. And the fact they haven't got them is what is stopping or keeping them in the rut. And I think as the story I told before, the manager made no connection between his lack of engagement with his staff as he sat in his office miles away from where they were and the fact that morale in the organization was low. He didn't make that connection at all. So I think to recognize that for a start and to get some coaching and to work through that.

Professor Wayne Cascio, who has done a lot of work in restructuring organizations and doesn't believe in layoffs, for example, he says you can't shrink your way to prosperity. And a lot of these managers think that the way out of this, all they know is to control things, which is a very contractual thing rather than being expansive. And all this people stuff we've been talking about that's very expansive stuff.

**David:** I would agree with you in terms of CEO's and some of the upper management not necessarily empathizing with the workers. In the work we do with teams to build relationships, one thing we focus on is using tools to understand, to get people to understand themselves first and then help them understand others. We talk about if you want to understand what makes people tick, if you want to click with people so you can understand what makes them tick.

So in the tools, the tool I call the Click Colours we actually we talk about the 4 main personality types. You've got your analytical types, you've got your organizational types, you've got your playful creative

types and you've got your caring types. Of course, we all have all the colors but what I find is there is a huge preponderance of leaders who are in the blue zone or the analytical type and that's because they're good at crunching the numbers, they're good at the bottom line, they've been successful because they've been able to make profit for their companies. But diametrically opposed to them are the caring side, so they don't have the same emotional investment in relationship and consequently they don't see the benefit of investing in teams.

I worked with one client who got me in to work with his teams and I said, "When you have your staff meetings ...", and he said, "Oh no, we don't have staff meetings anymore, all we did was just talk and nothing gets done." So *he* didn't need the staff meetings. One of the things that leaders could do if they don't feel that need to build relationships and they think people can just take it or leave it, I think they're doing themselves a disservice, especially if we say relationships are the foundation of all achievement.

So what leaders could do is take a good look at their own personalities and that of the people in their team and work out how you can get on with others by understanding.

**Carla:** David if I can add to that to because that really concurs with a lot of my thinking. I teach supervisory skills to supervisors and I approach it very similar to you. I teach them how to understand themselves first and then others. I put it in the context of being a psychologist that leaders today more so than ever need to be emotionally intelligent. They need to use the transformational approach to leadership being coached and mentored and be facilitated rather than utilizing the old storm and control approach.

I think if organizations are going to be sustainable through this, like we say relationships are at the core of it, regardless of what generation. We are all people and we need similar things. I think leadership and managers and how they interact with people in the workplace is essential. Like Maree said, it may not cost much and unfortunately a lot of leaders and managers see working with people and managing people is the warm and fuzzy aspects. But that is actually a myth.

**David:** Exactly and that's often because it doesn't fit with their personality style. They don't feel it so they don't understand that other people do need it.

**Carla:** And like you said, a lot of them have come up through the ranks, been given no training, they've been promoted on technical ability and they need to learn how to be emotionally intelligent and develop the softer side.

**David:** I agree yes.

So Carla I'm interested in your answer to Maree's question. You're a psychologist, you know what makes people tick. But do you find that the clients you deal with, the managers and leaders, do they know what makes their people tick? If they don't do they actually realize that they don't know?

**Carla:** I think a lot of time they're doing the job of managing and dealing with the performance issues and dealing with the production outcome that they forget or it's not something they actively reflect on. I think Maree's comment that a lot of people don't make the leap for themselves, and so I think it's our role as consultants and working with organizations to help them make those leaps so that they're able to ... A lot of the time I run coaching sessions or I do training and all of a sudden you see the light bulb moment where people suddenly realize oh actually I do need to understand this stuff and this stuff is vital.

So maybe in some ways that has suddenly become sharper for them as a result of them having to do something, not because they were proactively going to do it in the first place.

**Carla:** I think we need to lead them to do it and I think we need to assist them. And we also need to help them to realize that this is essential for their future. Also in retaining employees.

## Is Some Short-Term Pain Inevitable?

That leads me onto something, Maree, you mentioned earlier. You were quoting Professor Wayne Cascio who said that you can't shrink your way to prosperity. It makes me think that there may be some organizations who *are* thinking prosperity but there are a whole bunch of them who are just thinking survival at the moment, and they don't care whether shrinking themselves is actually going to hurt their future prosperity. They're wondering whether they've got a future at all unless they actually take some drastic steps now.

So is it dangerous thinking to just think that we've got to survive and let's put prosperity off to the future or is it something that some organizations just have to do?

**Maree:** In my reading, there are organizations that literally do have to take some drastic measures in these times. But it may be that they should have taken those measures before anyway. It may be that their upper levels of management were too heavy anyway and they weren't, their organizations weren't lean enough. So they've made those moves which perhaps should have been made anyway.

But the whole idea, like the thing that Wayne Cascio says I think that is most important, he's supporting Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard's comments to us that don't think first in terms of cutting your people. Think first of all the other alternatives. And he makes the point that back particularly in the 90's many of the organizations that downsized at that time because they really believed they had to, were quite profitable at the time but they didn't remain so.

What happens when they do that is they create a very unstable workplace and he makes the point that stability in itself is a value that we ought give some great credibility to. And he says when a workplace becomes unstable everybody in it becomes cautious and weary and tentative and they are not giving to their job, they're hesitant to take risks, they're hesitant to step forward and offer to do things. There is a whole feeling of uneasiness, tension, disengagements they're seeing.

So I think even for those organizations that really do believe they have to do things drastic to survive, it would be worth their while to getting some outside consultancy I think to work through that stuff before they take those knee jerk reactions.

Carla what is your take on this? You made a comment earlier along similar lines. You said people tend to be cutting people rather than looking at other things they can do with their production process. Are there some organizations who can't help but cut people at the moment or can everyone think of other things first?

**Carla:** I think some organizations unfortunately are in the position where they probably are going to be forced to make cuts. And like Maree indicated some organizations have been riding the boom with fairly top heavy structures. But I think it's really important that everybody step back and rather than reacting immediately to that situation that they look at it from a perspective that they respond to the situation. They invest in the people they do have because once we come through this, people as I mentioned earlier have long memories and for an organization they need to manage their change processes correctly in order to be an employer of choice in the future.

I think they need to start looking at the impact of actions now and where possible implementing whatever they can to retain staff, to create positive cultures. Jack Welch used to say if you want to change an organization you create a sense of urgency. Well we've currently got that environmentally and I think organizations need to respond by going, okay let's take advantage of this opportunity. Let's respond to it, let's create positive cultures, let's look at our relationships, let's

reflect on our management practices and just see what we can do in terms of taking the company forward.

If you have employees who are engaged, if the employees are engaged they're going to be more productive, they're going to be more likely to stay and this is the very time that organizations need to be aware that it's the danger period because there are still jobs out there where unhappy employees will jump ship. So organizations, I think, need to look at okay where are they at? What are the alternatives right now? How do we respond to this? And look with a future view and keep in mind the potential consequences when everything recovers.

Alicia if I can pick up that thread of some organizations having to cut staff. Some of the people who are being forced to leave are the Gen Y's. Some of them are middle management and some if we can use the term dead wood who've been there a long time. But a lot of them are the Gen Y's. From a Gen Y perspective what are they looking for? If an organization has had to let them go, what sort of support would they be expecting from the organization to help them ease the transition?

**Alicia:** Yes you're totally right there are a lot of Gen Y employees that are susceptible to being the first to go. They were the last to come in which means that they're highly susceptible to being the first to go.

Just as a side note, they're using different ways to start finding new jobs even in these tougher times. So Internet technology, for example, they're really coming in as vital ways that they're actually promoting their services out in the workplaces now. So if workplaces are looking for innovative Gen Y's they should be looking for them in such places as Twitter or Facebook and LinkedIn because they're utilizing everything they know to overcome these tough times. One of the things they do know very well is the Internet.

When they come into an organization I think it's important to make sure that their experience is positive right from the beginning. This is giving them opportunities to as we talked about today to develop those relationships within the organization. For Gen Y's there are two really important relationships, one with their manager and the other is with the colleagues around them. The relationship with their leaders is important because it sets up that partnership that they can actually mentor each other and I know it sounds presumptuous for the Gen Y employee to mentor their manager but it gives them a sense of what is happening in the reality from a young perspective. And if you're in an organization that is currently marketing to Generation Y, then they may have a different perspective that may be useful for their managers.

The second relationship I mentioned was with their colleagues. The workplace is an extension of a social network of a Gen Y. so if you can build strong relationships with a new employee with their colleagues and build friendships they're more likely to settle in right away and not job hop to the next job straightaway I suppose.

David, you said there are employees who might have been made redundant and you want to maximize their belief to be reemployed. So what are some of the things that employers can do if they're in the unfortunate position that they do have to let people go that they can still assist their staff in their future careers?

**David:** That *is* something I've been experiencing Gihan.

In terms of talking about where organizations are going to go and how we're going to change, just getting back to your other comment before I comment on the employment transition, I do believe that we need to focus on that positive future no matter how far away it is. If we focus on that positive future all our energies can be channeled into a process to help us get there. If that positive future involves maybe some people have to be let go, one of the things I'm finding with employers, employers of choice are actually wanting to leave good will with their people when they leave.

In terms of opportunity for myself where I've had some team building events cancelled, I've actually got more coming in now with employment transition programs from employers who want to tell their employees listen we really care for you but part of our short term strategy is we have to let people go. So we go through this employment transition program. But for me personally, you might have heard the Blue Ocean strategy as opposed to the Red Ocean strategy. The Red Ocean strategy is a market that is filled with people doing what everyone does and it's a big competitive market. I find this Blue Ocean of employment transition whereby I have this whole new market opening up and when I work with these people in this employment transition program. It's very similar strategies as I would use to maximize their potential as employees.

So we were talking about emotional intelligence before and that's the key thing we need to get into these people. And Carla being a psychologist would understand the fact that we need to get them to have an internal locus of control. In other words, what is happening in their life is up to them and their life is their responsibility as opposed to external focus of control where you blame everything and the surroundings for the situation you're in.

So I go through 9 quick steps to help them to work out where they are and where they're going to go. So, first of all, they need to make that decision that they want to have a brilliant life and career. Number 2 they need to reflect on where they are and where they want to go. Number 3 they need to be grateful for what they have. You think about Zimbabwe and I did some work in parts of New Guinea and these people don't have running water and these sorts of things. So we're still pretty well off.

Then they need to get clear about their future, they need to take action, they need to keep focused on those actions. Then they need to keep their work life balance going and they need to build connections with those people who support them emotionally and also through their career. One of the things we do know is people are happy in their life and work if they have a best friend at work. So there are those relationships again, not necessarily best friend in life but if you have a best friend at work they can help you be happy in your job.

And finally, it gets back to these thoughts again. Keep your thoughts positive because whatever you're thinking and feeling is creating your future, plus your actions. So if you're acting in a positive way I believe...it's almost like the Armageddon movie where everything crashes and burns and you come out of the flames and right here is the positive future.

**Carla:** David to add to that one of the big changes in psychology over the last 10 years has been this whole notion of positive psychology, whereby back years ago we used to think that focusing on "Woe is me, what is wrong with my life, what is wrong with my path?" If we talked about it lots eventually we would get rid of it. But the new movement in positive psychology, which is also linked to our health and immune system is that we need to keep that positive focus, be grateful for the very things we do have, keep things in perspective. We need to surround ourselves with support and positive people and positive cultures and that will really build our resilience and prevent employees struggling with stress and depression and anxiety.

I think for organizations it's important that they put in support for people and to help people maintain their internal focus of control and take responsibility for themselves. I remember back in the last recession doing a lot of training courses for organizations in how to actually manage the change for managers. How do you actually communicate job loss to people? Also for employees how do you actually cope with change? Providing them with the out placement interviews, retraining, re-skilling, there are a whole lot of things that organizations can be doing right now to assist their people and manage

that transition. But also looking forward to thinking positively that maybe they will be able to come through this intact.

**Maree:** Carla I would just like to add to that about the positive psychology movement. I think one of the things about that movement is particularly Martin Seligman who has been probably the father of the movement. He talks about our explanatory style; the thing that shapes our life is our explanatory style – the way we explain what is happening to us.

I think this is very relevant to what we're talking about today. Like if we want to talk about what is happening today in terms of doom and gloom, then what we're going to get is doom and gloom. Like something bad happens to some person and they say, "Why did this happen to me? Everything I touch is jinxed. It all goes wrong for me and it doesn't matter what I do." Something goes wrong for another person and they say, "What am I being asked to learn from this? What impact is this having on my life?" And they go away and reflect about it and think about it and they make the corresponding changes and everything turns out fine for them.

So I think we need today to change our explanatory styles so that we create a different way of explaining what is happening in this supposedly global economic crisis.

**Carla:** I think that's vital. One of the things I think is so critical at this time is that managers and the senior execs actually refrain some of the negative conversations in the workplace of the gloom and doom talk and positively talk up the future. Because if you're positive, David as you mentioned the law of attraction there is a lot of research, a lot of books, a lot of philosophies that are all saying the same thing. The more positive we can be the more likely we're going to attract that. And I think that it also in terms of the individual person it buffers people against stress and depression in particular of which one of the risks is not just people losing their job but people committing suicide because their job identity is so much a part of them.

Our suicide rates are currently higher than the national road toll, which is really, really awful. I think we need to look beyond just engaging employees in the workplace but protecting employees and also assisting them and supporting them to protect from some of those events or possibilities for people. And look forward to the future knowing that we have got a future it just may look different.

## Closing Comments

I'm really pleased that we are turning this around to end on a positive note. We're getting towards the end of our time and as much as we've been talking in the last question about people losing their jobs and how to manage that, most of the discussion we've had in this hour has been very positive. It's been cautiously optimistic and sometimes wildly optimistic for some of your clients as you related.

I know there will be people who will want to speak more with each of you and perhaps engage your services. So I would just like to ask each of you to briefly talk about what you do, what clients you work with and how you help them. So perhaps we can start with Maree.

**Maree:** I'm really on about helping leaders and managers grow and develop their professional lives so they can creatively manage the challenges that they and their organizations face. I do this with coaching and interactive workshops and training. It's presently primarily being done face to face but I'm beginning to produce some multimedia products that people can use for self education. My work actually rests on the mantra of look after your people and they will look after your organization.

So I'm actually working with leaders and managers helping them to learn how to do that and it's about helping them understand people dynamics and why people do what they do. And it's about developing good people skills and to be able to interact with people and inspire, motivate and engage them in the work of their organizations and get them to work with them rather than just for them. I think I'm hoping this is going to be good for me in this current climate because these are the things that are crucially important.

And what is the best way for people to get in touch with you Maree?

**Maree:** Probably through my website which is [www.PeopleEmpowered.com.au](http://www.PeopleEmpowered.com.au)

Alicia Curtis?

**Alicia:** I am passionate about working with inspiring young leaders and really helping organizations get the most from their Gen Y's. So I offer speaking, mentoring and consulting. I provide keynote speaking at conferences and events. I provide mentoring to young professionals, I run mentoring groups called yGen and this helps young professionals have a place where they can talk about the challenges they're having in the workplace as well as setting about their career development plans and offering solutions to them. I also consult to organizations. So if you're having a problem with your young employees, I can come in and have a talk to them, have a talk to the managers and look at specific strategies that would help your organization.

I've got 2 special reports on managing Generation Y employees in tough economic times which you can download from my website, which is [www.AliciaCurtis.com](http://www.AliciaCurtis.com). You can also email me on my website too.

Thanks Alicia, David?

**David:** Yes Gihan my expertise is leadership and team development and so basically my clients get me to come and talk to their people on how to become better leaders, better team players and better performance in work. So it's basically about building great team cultures that attract and retain good people and improve productivity and profit for the company.

How I do that depends upon my clients needs, so I wear a number of different hats. For example, I speak at national and international conferences and this often leads to working with a client at a deeper level, which might mean running like a 2 or 3 day team building retreat which is normally a combination of theory and practical. That may involve running training programs for management stuff in areas of leadership and team development either in-house or off site. And I work with some clients on an ongoing basis to help them create a positive team culture program or for upper management I might call it staff retention strategy.

Finally I write books and create other resources that companies use to build cultures that attract and retain good people. So all this is leading to good productivity and profit. If people want to contact me, they can visit my site at [www.TeamCoachCentral.com](http://www.TeamCoachCentral.com) or phone number is +61-89457-5413. Like Alicia I have lots of free downloads and in fact in these tough economic times I have a free e-book called *Workplace Fun Ideas*. So if you would like to visit the website and go to the resource section you can download that for free.

Excellent thanks David. And Carla?

**Carla:** I have an organization called Integral Solutions and I've recently acquired the Emergency Support Network. These companies both provide training and consulting services and that's all around making a positive difference in the workplace to employees. So what we look at doing is enhancing employee well being and their engagement. So I work across the areas of stress and resiliency, peer support, process intervention, conflict resolution, interpersonal dynamics, workplace diversity, bullying and harassment and change management. So it's fairly wide but at the heart of it all is positive psychology and making things better for people.

I can be contacted via my website [www.ISPSYCH.com](http://www.ISPSYCH.com) and the phone number is 61-82903-7777.

I would like to give just one last comment; I would like to quote Barack Obama who is fairly topical at the moment. He makes a comment, I believe that if we seek this moment to look beyond our differences and focus on the challenges that affect us all we can meet them and it's our choice. And I think that sums up this whole area really nicely. Thank you.

Thanks Carla. I was going to ask each person to give a closing comment and Carla you've done that perfectly. So Maree Harris do you have a final comment for people who are listening to this program?

**Maree:** I've just found to know that there are people like Carla, David and Alicia around who are also feeling so committed to helping organizations look after their people is very affirming for me because I see many more people around where they're not putting their people first and they're not recognizing that they are their greatest assets. So thank you to all of you for your inspiration and your affirmation today.

Alicia?

**Alicia:** I think it's very easy to look at your youngest employees in a negative way, not only in these tough times but has been documented in recent times anyway. I try and challenge my clients to really looking at what are the ways you can harness the strength of your youngest employees to benefit the productivity and profits of your organization, especially in these times.

Thanks, and David?

**David:** I would like to finish off with just reiterating the fact that we need to keep that positive thinking up and going. Bear in mind that for some people it's easier than others. We're all obviously positive people talking about this but some people find it difficult. For those people who are finding it difficult to be positive in these times I would like you to ask yourself what Michael Losier called in his book, *The Law of Attraction*, the magic question: When you have negative thoughts ask yourself, so what do I want? So if you have a workplace with low morale or low productivity say to yourself what do I want? I want a workplace with high morale. Then your subconscious will start working on what do I need to have high morale? I need to do this, I need to start praising people, I need to have team building retreats to get help to do this. And if you start thinking about this the whole time, so what do I want? I want a workplace with great morale; it's more likely to happen. To finish off, I would like to quote Brian Tracy who says, "You get what you think about most of the time."

Carla Frayne, Maree Harris, David Koutsoukis and Alicia Curtis, thanks so much for your time but especially thanks for your wisdom and your insight. Bye for now.