



Victorian Leaders: creating the next generation of business champions

SOME of Victoria's brightest business minds gathered to launch a unique business development organisation – Victorian Leaders – at Kooyong Lawn Tennis Club on September 18.

Kooyong, the scene of many a titanic on-court battle among the world's best, was an iconic and inspirational venue for this gathering of talented Victorian business people, many of whom are anticipated to also challenge the world's best in their particular fields.

Victorian Leaders is a unique collaborative business mentoring and capability-building group, based on a highly-successful Queensland program, but with its own character and priorities.

According to Victorian Leaders CEO, Robert Ford, the program has all resources and networks of the Queensland Leaders group, available to members and supporters, but it is being developed organically to suit the unique characteristics, structures and “personality” of Victorian business.



Victorian Leaders CEO, Robert Ford addresses the inaugural meeting at Kooyong.

“Victorian Leaders focuses on developing the next generation of Victoria's leading companies,” Mr Ford said. “It achieves this through the provision of knowledge, networks and capital to 25 of Melbourne's leading private companies.”

Mr Ford became a Queensland Leaders Expert Member for banking and finance while in the role of state manager of a leading bank. He immediately saw the value of being involved in this unique mentoring environment and found it also positively impacted his own career and business outlook.

“The question I found myself asking these up-and-coming business leaders all the time was, ‘How can I help?’” Mr Ford said. “I saw that it was not about being there as a bank, it was about being there as part of a support team – I saw some great outcomes and realised the power of this business building environment.

“That is why I pressed International Leaders to help me to bring it to Victoria – my home state – and where I really feel we can make a positive difference, particularly in these very challenging times for business.”

Victorian Leaders is developing its own mix of mentoring and advice sessions, instructional workshops, networking events and social events that help to create a unique collaborative business environment. The inaugural knowledge sessions at Kooyong focused on human resource engagement, creating business value and sales effectiveness.

“It is about very successful businesses – and the very people who made them successful -- helping up-and-coming Victorian businesses to reach their potential,” Mr Ford said. “I saw some amazing

outcomes as this developed in Queensland, where certain very bright people, running businesses that may have traditionally been seen as competing in some ways, collaborated to develop better outcomes for everybody concerned.

“I guess it’s an example of all boats being lifted up on a rising tide,” he said. “Many great friendships – not just business relationships – are sure to emerge from Victorian Leaders, just as I saw happen in Queensland.”

Mr Ford said the Victorian Leaders network provides members with access to key industry, government and business leaders, increases management skills and connectivity – including life skills – and harnesses the strength and resources of Victoria’s business leaders.

“Private business owners, founders and CEOs are often too busy to take time away from their business and seek guidance and advice from those outside their traditional trusted sources,” Mr Ford said.

“Business leaders today owe it to themselves and their stakeholders to get off the dance floor and get up on the balcony. Too many of our leaders don’t know what they don’t know, and are unaware that there are options, alternatives and innovation which they can access to help their business grow and improve.”

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The key to success in Queensland has been the unique collaborative environment of larger companies and more experienced business leaders mentoring and encouraging the member companies’ leaders. One of that program’s first members was Jamie Pherous, CEO of Corporate Travel Management (CTM), which was guided and encouraged to IPO by Queensland Leaders.

CTM is now the most technically-advanced and awarded corporate travel company in Australia and has also been expanding internationally through acquisition for several years. CTM has stayed with Queensland Leaders as an Industry Partner and last year Mr Pherous joined the Advisory Board. The International Leaders organisation has recently been developed, incorporating the Queensland Leaders, Victorian Leaders and the soon-to-be-launched NSW Leaders and New Zealand Leaders groups.

Mr Ford said Victorian Leaders was developing its own personality, using the foundations of International Leaders. Melbourne’s strong team sports heritage was already playing a role.

“Melbourne has such a great sporting feel about it and I cannot help but think that this element is already adding a unique aspect to Victorian Leaders,” he said. “It could also partly be the influence of our advisory board chairman, John Buchanan, who is probably best known as the most successful coach of the Australian Cricket Team in recent memory.

“He is passionate about business and studies how the same drive that great sportspeople exhibit is similar to that of great business leaders. John is an inspirational business leader in his own right these days and his energy is already helping to make the Victorian Leaders program something very special.”

Mr Ford said Victorian Leaders was essentially a structured professional development and networking series. A once-off membership fee covers the 12 month Executive Series and then a further two year involvement through the Alumni Series.

“The preferred member profile includes companies which have, or are building, a market leading brand, technology or skill base; are seeking growth opportunities for national or international

expansion; are in wealth creation mode or seeking growth opportunities; or for companies whose executives are seeking networks to evolve their business and are open to new ideas, information and thinking,” Mr Ford said.

“As we have said from day one as we formed Victorian Leaders, great business is a team sport. I guess you could use the analogy that we are helping to develop business champions here ... who will lead and develop champion teams.”

www.vicleaders.com.au

ends