ISSUE 02
JULY / AUGUST 2017

HIGHER STATE

THE MAGAZINE FOR HIGH PERFORMERS

MEET THIS HEAD OF HR / SINGER / COMEDY GENIUS

Draw on diverse skills and talents to shape yourself into a high performing, inspiring leader - Denise Hanlon shows you know it's done

THE 10 MINUTE WORKOUT

No time to exercise? Here's how to fit working out into a busy lifestyle

MIND YOUR OWN "BUSYNESS"

Take back control of your time and stay productive

ENERGISE WITH CHOCOLATE

Use the power of cacao to focus and get more done

Thrive at work - make it fun!

BE THE BEST VERSION OF YOU

Edition 2, July / August 2017

Welcome back to a fresh issue of Higher State magazine, where we introduce you to the world of high performance in small, bite-sized chunks.

Every two months, I'll share actionable tips, tools and strategies to show you how you can perform just a little bit better in all aspects of your work (and subsequently, this will have a positive impact on your personal life).

We explore business productivity but also mental, physical and emotional strategies to help you perform at your very best.

This month, we have a special interview with an HR superstar - a leader with a little something that makes her stand out from the rest.

If you want to raise your game and learn from other high performers, this is the place to be.

Abi

360-degree performance optimisation

ENABLING PEAK PERFORMANCE

Talk to Abi if you're looking for fresh, innovative ways to spark higher workplace performance, productivity, engagement and results.

Abi helps high achieving executives and teams to get more done – with more focus, more energy and less stress. She blends business productivity with physical, mental and emotional factors that impact performance.

After a decade in corporate banking and senior strategy roles, Abi left to launch her own ventures in the education and wellbeing fields. She combines her business expertise with skills as a personal trainer and nutrition coach, taking a holistic approach when delivering workshops, coaching and consultancy solutions.

Every business is different and each individual has unique needs and drivers, so it is important to identify these if you want to optimise team performance.

Abigail is a Chartered Banker with a 1st Class Honours Degree in International Management. She is also a qualified personal trainer, Pilates instructor and nutrition coach.

www.abigailireland.com

Want to amplify staff performance, engagement and results?
Ask about Abi's workshops, coaching and strategy solutions - abi@abigailireland.com.

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IT'S..... SHOWTIME!

What do you get when you cross an HR executive with a singer and a comedian?

You get....

Denise Hanlon!

In this edition of *Higher State*, Abigail chats to **Denise,** Head of Human Resources at ASX-listed Vocus Group.

HAVE A CRACK

VOCUS COMPANY VALUE

What can I say? You're in for a fascinating read when Denise Hanlon is the subject. Denise is the Head of HR at ASX-listed Vocus Group. She is based in sunny Sydney and she certainly brought a little sunshine to *Higher State* magazine when we caught up with her.

Abi's Observations: *Denise is one of those people who brings fun and results to work. She's not afraid to be different, shake things up and challenge the status quo. She brings her unique style to the table and a 'no nonsense', refreshing view of the world of HR, leadership and how to get the best out of your team.*

*Denise shares her stories about pink leotards, muppets and the 'buggerisation factor' - plus admitting to being 'a little f**ked up'. All of this brings a human side to the corporate world - showing that you don't need to be so serious if you want to perform at your best. Quite the opposite...*

Key Takeaway: Enjoying what you do is one of the most important ingredients if you are to thrive at work. Having fun allows you to get into a flow, reduce mental resistance and channel energy to achieve results. Be present and remember that work and life aren't always linear. Enjoy the journey and give your best at all stages.

HERE'S DENISE

You're doing a brilliant job at Vocus, creating a fun environment with great values that stand out – what was the thinking behind that?

Vocus is the melding together of around two dozen businesses acquired over the years. So, even though we are a big company now, we never want to lose the stuff that's made us so successful. 'No Muppets' and 'Don't Screw the Customer' were from the original Vocus business. We then merged with M2 Group and one of their values was "ZT4DH" – zero tolerance for dickheads! So the final version of our values includes 'Don't be a Dickhead' and taps into the legacy of both companies.

I remember having a very intellectual discussion with a member of my team about the difference between a muppet and a dickhead. Midway into the discussion, we both looked at each other smiling and said, "there is no place other than Vocus where we would be having this conversation". They certainly didn't teach me that in my MBA!

Another of our values is 'Have a Crack'. Just have a go. We're absolutely compelled to be different from the other TelCos and we detest bureaucracy.

I'm heavily invested in the current version of the values. They're splashed all over our walls, on our website, annual report...and so on.

It's great, as it's elevated the brand.

Yes, totally – it's a source of competitive advantage for that reason. People who want to work here are attracted to it, customers are attracted to it....

A lady in my team took a photo in front of the values and it went crazy on LinkedIn with over 50,000 views. They are very powerful.

So how did you get started and get to where you are today? You were in Finance before HR.

Yes, I was going to be an accountant. I was very good at Economics and Maths at school.

I noticed you had good grades and distinctions!

Yes...I'm very competitive. If I'm going to do it, I want to knock it out of the park. I have to work hard but I enjoy the success.

I started my Commerce degree to be an accountant. Halfway through, I pulled the pin - I didn't enjoy it at all, so I got an office job in the police department.

After a few years, the big boss asked me to take on a supervisory role. I was 21 and I supervised two people who were at least twice my age.

Someone left the Police at the time and went to study something called "personnel management". I asked questions and learned it was about remuneration, performance management, recruitment... that sounded fascinating so I enrolled myself into a 12-month college (TAFE) course.

I studied HR to be a better manager. One recruiter told me to stick to finance – he said that's where the money was (he was right!). That spurred me on even more. I thought "F*** you, I'm going to get an HR job just to prove you wrong." And I did.

My first HR role was managing a team of 15. I was really into this management thing. I did that for a couple of years in HR, then moved back into a generalist role at a 'not for profit' – that was fantastic. I managed Finance, HR and IT (no idea about IT but I learned what a standard operating environment was!), and was responsible for budgeting, business planning, fundraising...

After 4 years, I thought I should move to a different sector and took an HR role at a health insurer, managing a team of HR business partners. The business was eventually bought out by Bupa. I took redundancy and thought I'd get another job easily but I didn't - this was during the GFC.

I managed to get a contract and fell into financial services, later taking a permanent job at ING Direct. After that, I led the People & Communications workstream at Lloyds International (Lloyds Banking Group's Australian subsidiary) during its sale process. I then contracted at Westpac and later branched out on my own as a consultant.

Soon after, I was told about the job at Vocus. The business was on the verge of a major acquisition and they were looking for someone a little f***ed up. No, literally.

"Part of gaining experience is working with and for different people. "

-DENISE HANLON

That's what they told me! When I heard that, a little bolt of electricity went through me and I thought, "that sounds like me".

I met the CEO and managed to convince him that if he wanted a workplace that was different to the others, I was the girl for him. That was over 2 years ago.

Every 6 months, the face of the company has changed fundamentally. The company is now 10 fold, with 3 major acquisitions and mergers having happened in the last 2 years.

While the deal team is busy leading up to an acquisition, Day 1 of welcoming a newly acquired business to Vocus is all about communication, putting your arm around people, and starting relationships - that's all HR.

The secret to success is, whenever you acquire a new company, have the biggest party you can possibly afford on Day 1 and the rest is easy! We flew 1000 people down to Melbourne when we merged, took over Melbourne Town Hall and had a huge party. The goodwill and connections that it created was amazing – it brought everyone together in ways that 'cultural change programs' never could.

What barriers and challenges did you encounter?

I have had a few periods without permanent work and I certainty felt a sense of urgency when looking for work at times – I wanted to contribute, feel valued, use my brain and earn money. I came

to realise that people genuinely want to help but sometimes I could be shy to ask. Once you do, people really will try hard to help you out – find you work or connect you with someone else. You just need to be in their ear a little bit.

Did you have any mentors during your career journey?

Nothing formal…I'm #nudging50 (I cannot wait to turn 50 in a few years). I love getting older and telling the young bucks that "I know shit just because I know shit!". Part of gaining experience is working with and for different people.

Probably the most pivotal moment was when I was in the police. The boss of the police station was always a sworn officer, and then there was

"I'm somebody's superstar and I'm somebody's muppet."

someone looking after everything that wasn't policing. I had that job. I was 27 years old, managing 36 people. I was terrified every day that people would find out I didn't have a clue, haha!

The boss told me this story…he used to work in a bank in his late teens. He was responsible for locking up the bank at the end of the day and reconciling the money. He told me he had more authority then than he did heading up the police station. Once, he had to seek approval just to make an international phone call for the purposes of an investigation.

This story stuck in my mind. What are we doing to smart people with all our rules, processes and approvals that scream "I don't trust you, you're a muppet and I'm going to introduce a rule just in case you're a muppet"?

Sometimes we make really, clever people do really stupid stuff. This drives me every day.

At Vocus, we hire clever people and no muppets. We don't always need a process or approvals.

You designed the Vocus values. What are *your* top 3 values?

They are also my personal values - that's me in a nutshell. I'm absolutely passionate about the fact that everyone is brilliant at something and sometimes they're in jobs that don't allow them to play to their strengths or tap into what they're really good at.

Historically, companies (even us at one point) have used hideous performance management processes where we evaluated people against what they achieved in the last 12 months. We gave them a mediocre score and then had a conversation about development opportunities. It was a bog-standard process with a sub-par outcome.

We don't focus on what you're brilliant at - so you end up with a development plan for something you're not very good at. The best you can ever be is mediocre. It's soul destroying and sucks the energy out of you.

The reality is, HR typically doesn't like to administer this process and people don't like doing it, so why do we keep it up? There's no rule book to performance management so why not do something that everyone likes? And that's exactly what we did…

I'm a good singer and I enjoy doing it – so imagine a development plan that allowed me to sing more, get better at singing, raise money by singing, whatever it is. But if I'm really bad at cartwheels, don't make me do cartwheels!

We still struggle as humans and go 'muppet searching' – as if there's a cardboard cut out of what perfection is. I'm somebody's superstar and I'm somebody's muppet. It's frustrating that it's so hard for people to let weaknesses go.

Have you used your singing talents at work?

I did a '10 weeks of giving' video series last Christmas – in our newly merged company, we wanted to tell our employees what they now had access to in terms of benefits. Each week, my team made a video of me singing about one of the benefits. This is one of the few jobs where I feel I can use both parts of my personality to complement each other.

You seem to create a fun environment at work. How do you keep your sense of humour when things aren't going smoothly?

I do get frustrated as anyone does, but I move through things very quickly. I've got the memory of a goldfish – I think, oh that's pissed me off and then I'm onto the next thing.

This seems to be a common trait of high performers. They don't dwell. They move on quickly and figure out how to change things.

I'm a fixer and an optimist. It's not always helpful but I just can't see that something is going to fail or fall over. Just have a crack, have a go and see what happens. We can deal with the fallout.

I can do that in HR – we can experiment because, generally, I'm not doing something that means life or death.

"We struggle as humans and go muppet searching"

Of course I have bad days and I verbalise things – I'm not a sulker. People will know I'm not having a good time but it will be over in 5 minutes and it really doesn't happen very often.

How do you prioritise work and stay on top of everything?

Delegation!! I have a team of 25 in Australia and a team in NZ – I don't think I'm smarter than any of them. I actually think it's my job to unleash their potential.

I think of that policeman who had more responsibility as a teenager in a bank than as a superintendent. I think, have a go – I'll help and we can bounce ideas if needed. I use the skills of other people.

I'm also quite organised. I have lists. I write on the back of my hand if I really don't want to forget something. I still handwrite social reminders in a physical diary and I schedule work into my calendar. I get through a lot and I'm obsessed with deadlines.

If something is due Friday, I'll have it done by Wednesday to account for the 'buggerisation' factor.

How do you have that discipline to get it done early?

I don't know. I just know you can't always plan things. Life isn't linear. Something might happen so I get things done earlier and then at least I have a two day buffer.

Or I'll get it 95% done and then sit with it for a while. It's a way of not putting more pressure on myself.

What characteristics annoy you when working with others?

Using DISC, I'm a high I (Influencer). I delegate and I'm quite quick. The opposite of that is high Cs – very data driven, analytical, perfectionists who can seem (to me) to take forever to get something done.

How do you deal with that?

I use DISC to have conversations. It's a way to give permission to be irritated with each other whilst respectful of the fact we're just different. Some jobs require the need to be detailed and accurate, so I respect that and the fact that brains operate differently.

Tell me about what you do outside of work and why.

I was always the class clown, quick-witted, smart-mouthed and always loved music. Party after party, I'd be standing on something and singing *Jailhouse Rock*.

I decided to join a band whilst studying and working. It wasn't a 'girl band' though. It was called *Stark Raving Mad*.

We dressed up and got on famously. It was a really popular band and the comedy, shtick and costume felt more like me. My little taste of being a rockstar!!

All these years later, I've morphed it into a one-woman show. I'm a singer with a smart mouth and a comedian second. Not so long ago, I was Olivia Newton John – in a pink leotard!

"If something is due Friday, I'll have it done by Wednesday to account for the 'buggerisation' factor."

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Do you think your 'show' life has helped you at work?

It adds a new dimension. People Google me and find my showreel – it adds a layer of friendliness to HR. My boss calls me the CPO – Chief Party Organiser. The extreme side is where people think you're just fluff so it's a balancing act. It's funny how we put on a façade at work – why does it have to be like that? I'm the first one there and the last one to leave at a party – stealing the mic at karaoke.

It sounds like you have a good balance between work and play – have you always had that?

Yes, because I have other interests outside of work. I don't perform very often – maybe a couple of times a year. And I studied for a long time as well – so I always had to be somewhere or do something after work. I can compartmentalise fairly well.

Do you have a role model?

Each experience brings something new to me. I'm attracted to entertainers like Bette Midler and Tina Turner - people who can make thousands of people feel emotions.

I've met some amazing, entrepreneurial people at Vocus – people who aren't limited. I really enjoy being around people who started their own internet service provider in the 90s and here they are now in a large, successful organisation. It unshackles the thinking.

In many companies, there is too much focus on achieving perfection. The need to tick off 14 competencies at 3 different levels before you can be promoted. This limits people and doesn't get the most out of them.

What did you want to be when growing up?

I don't think I've been anything other than in the now. I can plan ahead – I'm very interested in when I can retire and what's in my super fund, haha – but I've learned that life is not linear. Certainly, your career is not linear.

What you want to be in the next 5 years? If you knew the answer, maybe it limits you in some way. Maybe you would miss an opportunity that came along because it didn't fit your plan.

Finally, what's your favourite song?

This Will Be by Natalie Cole – she sings the clappers out of it!

~ THAT'S A WRAP ~

"Each experience brings something new to me."

Know someone who lives and breathes high performance?

Contact Abi to learn more about the superstars we feature in Higher State magazine. Email: abi@abigailireland.com

PRODUCTIVITY: STOP BEING BUSY

Get over the 'busyness' syndrome

"Busy" is a buzzword that gets thrown around far too much these days. What does it even mean? And what does it take to manage your own "busyness" so that you can reclaim your time and control over how you work and live?

It's important to note that everyone has a different interpretation of what being busy actually means - and everyone has a different threshold and ability to cope.

If you're constantly feeling overwhelmed and unable to keep up with work and personal demands on your time, ask yourself the following questions (be honest!):

1. Do you have too much work?
2. Is your productivity lower than it could be?

A huge aspect of Abigail's corporate career involved advising senior executives on strategy, process improvement and business operations. For Abi's help to raise staff performance and combat "unnecessary busyness", email her at abi@abigailireland.com.

And...ACTION!

Spend some time reflecting on why you are feeling busy and what you mean by "busyness". It's not a badge of honour!

Read the full Mind Your Own Busyness article - CLICK HERE for more insights.

MINDSET: POSITIVE ENERGY FLOW

Energy flows where focus goes

We all have days (or weeks!) where we feel less than happy, we can't concentrate and we are distracted by things in life that consume all of our available energy stores.

Worrying, wallowing in self-pity, overthinking, replaying stressful situations, complaining about others, having petty disagreements with loved ones.....all of these things consume our brainpower and waste valuable mental energy.

Instead, focus on what you have control over. Channel your energy to achieve more at work, invest in personal development and become a role model for others. Instead of moaning about trivial things that you can't really change, focus on being productive and making a positive difference where you do have some influence.

Take action, put one foot in front of the other and be **consistent**. Forget about motivation - you simply can't rely on motivation to drive you onwards and up. Consistency is the key to sustained peak performance and, in the process, acknowledging that a positive mindset will get you further. A negative attitude does nothing to stimulate progress so don't waste your time in this space.

Your mindset is the only thing that truly differentiates you from the crowd. If you want to channel your energy into something productive and fun, register for ***the FREE 10 Day Productivity Challenge that kicks off every Monday. One quick and easy challenge every day for 10 days.***

FITNESS: 10 MINUTE WORKOUT

Focus on quality, not quantity

When it comes to exercise, it's important to know why you are working out and what you are trying to achieve. What are your fitness goals and are you actually getting results?

So many people believe that they don't have time for exercise. That's simply not true. Everyone can spare 10 minutes a day, right? The common misconception is that you have to get to the gym or go somewhere special to work out. Right?

Wrong! If you have a plan and you know what you're doing, a 10 minute daily home workout will give you what you need to stay fit, healthy and energised.

10 Minute Home Workout

Click the video to the right to get a great home workout. 1 round = 10 mins, including warm up and cool down (keep these to 2 mins each).

Have more time? Complete 2 rounds or reduce rest breaks and complete 3 rounds non-stop. Remember to stretch at the end! **Click here for the full 30-minute plan.**

Abigail is a qualified Personal Trainer, Pilates instructor and nutrition coach. She draws on these skills when developing performance strategies, workshop and coaching content. A 360-degree approach to amplify staff productivity, performance, results and engagement.

NUTRITION: CHOCOLATE SNACK POT

Prep Time: 2 mins
Serves: 1 per jar

Abigail takes a comprehensive approach to high performance - focusing on business productivity tools and strategies, but also mental, physical & emotional factors. ***Make food choices that sharpen your mind.*** *Find out more: abi@abigailireland.com.*

This is probably one of the easiest and tastiest snacks you can make - packed with protein and slow release carbohydrates.

You can experiment with ingredients but here's a simple version to get started with.

Cacao is full of antioxidants that counter ageing and problematic free radicals. It also contains magnesium (an energy boosting mineral) and it is a natural mood enhancer. Can't get better than that!

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup rolled oats
- 3/4 cup coconut or almond milk
- 1 tsp 100% pure maple syrup
- 1 tsp cacao powder
- 1 tsp chia seeds
- 1/4 tsp vanilla powder
- 4 raspberries

PREPARATION

1. Place all ingredients into a glass jar (an empty jam jar is perfect).

2. Secure lid onto jar and shake well.

3. Leave chocolate pot in the fridge for at least 15 minutes to allow the oats to soak. Leave overnight for best results and add more milk if desired to create a runnier consistency. Eat with a spoon straight out of the jar!

WORK WITH ABI

Talk to Abigail if you're looking for fresh, innovative ways to spark higher workplace performance, productivity, engagement and results.

Abi spent a decade in financial services before building her own businesses in the education and wellbeing fields. Her banking career took her on a journey through private equity, corporate banking, strategy and business management with major banks in London and Sydney.

In her corporate and entrepreneurial roles, Abigail learned how effective business skills, mindset, fitness and nutrition came together to make a huge difference to her energy, focus and ability to deliver results.

Abigail works with organisations to amplify staff performance and productivity through workshops, coaching and strategic programmes. She focuses on business productivity strategies whilst incorporating mental, physical and emotional drivers of peak performance.

PERFORMANCE COACHING

- Tailored coaching sessions for individuals and small groups
- An opportunity to tackle issues and roadblocks that restrict performance
- Accountability and goal setting to drive results
- **CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE**

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

- Tailored in-house programmes and initiatives
- Design and development of solutions to increase productivity, lift engagement, boost performance and achieve business objectives
- **CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE**

PRODUCTIVITY WORKSHOPS

- Practical, value-packed 90-minute workshops that have an immediate impact on productivity and create a lasting, high performance mindset
- Foundation level workshops focused on Business Strategies, Nutrition, Body or Mindset OR tailored staff/executive workshops
- **CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE**

FITNESS & NUTRITION

- Coaching sessions for individuals and small groups
- Tools, education and guidance to build long-term healthy habits and boost energy levels - leading to healthier, more focused, more productive staff
- **CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE**

JUMPSTART SESSIONS

- Punchy, 45-minute coaching session for individuals who want to tackle one specific performance issue and take action towards a resolution
- Short, sharp, tailored session to reset focus and develop an action plan
- Option for follow-on sessions to reinforce accountability and commitment to achieve key milestones
- **CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE**

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"PEAK PERFORMANCE IS MEDITATION IN MOTION."

GREG LOUGANIS

Thanks for reading Higher State! Look out for the next issue in September 2017. Until then, practise what you've learned in this publication, learn from Denise AND send me your feedback so I can bring you more quality content in the future.

Have a productive day ahead!

Abi

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