

Leadership: in conversation with Faye Freeman (President, Aurorium)

Tom Haynes, Page Executive: Thanks for speaking today. What does “leadership” mean to Aurorium?

Faye Freeman: Leadership is about people empowerment, how you empower people to achieve and how to create an environment where magic happens. It’s challenging to lead people through Covid, Brexit, economic difficulties; it’s important to create an environment that makes them feel secure and supports their growth.

TH: “Secure” is an interesting word.

FF: It’s about creating that safe environment where people can push their boundaries, try new things and learn from mistakes, all while having a safety net. They can bounce back and learn from the experience, that’s how you can unlock potential.

TH: That must be a powerful message when you’re hiring?

FF: Definitely. People want autonomy and to be part of creating something, they want the opportunity to innovate. But they also want to know they are trusted to try and something new and that we support learning and growth this way.

TH: That can be difficult maintain as people move into senior leadership roles.

FF: It can. I read *The Advantage* by Patrick Lencioni about organisational health. It resonated with me and I’m an advocate that a leadership team should work to be vulnerable with each other and to challenge each other constructively.

We’re on this journey as a leadership team, becoming more comfortable challenging each other in a supportive way – and are more willing to admit when we need help. We’re one team: we win together, we fail together. I believe we’ve blossomed with that approach.

TH: I’ll have a read! How have you found hiring new leaders?

FF: We try to be honest about who we are, our values, and that this company is being built as we grow. It isn’t for everyone, but we try to establish that in the interview, so we end up hiring people who will thrive here. Combine this with a great package and offering roles that have a real impact on our strategy and results, Aurorium is a compelling prospect for new leaders.

TH: When senior hiring doesn’t work, it’s often due to a misalignment of expectations vs. reality.

FF: We try to tell the good, the bad and the ugly. And encourage people to ask us about the bad and the ugly! We want everyone to come in with open eyes. Now we are more comfortable in our own skin, able to say to people “we’re not perfect, but we love it here”, and we are finding it easier to attract good leaders. We’re lucky in that sense.

TH: I’d say that’s skill, not luck. How do you develop and retain the people who already work for Aurorium?

FF: We do pretty well at promoting from within. If we see people with the right talent and attitude, we give them opportunities. Great attitude can’t be taught. So we try to expose them to things to broaden their experience.

We sometimes take people outside of their traditional area, into something completely different (with the right support structure). Earlier in my career, I was given the opportunity to move into a role I didn’t have experience in. It was scary, but I gave it a go and it ultimately allowed me to progress. If someone hadn’t taken that chance on me, I wouldn’t be sat here today.

TH: That can be really effective, especially with a shortage of talent.

FF: Definitely. We joke that we’re always working “in the grey”. The last few years have thrown up so much ambiguity, not knowing what is around the corner. So being comfortable with change – in your own role or the wider business decisions – is so important now. I think in a way we actually get energy from that.

TH: It’s been a strange few years.

FF: It has. But if you focus on keeping your team happy, healthy and motivated, everything else should follow on.

TH: What a great point to end on. This has been really interesting, thank you.

FF: Thank you.



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