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Martin Dineen Of MJD Executive On How To Take Your Company From Good To Great



The business is not all about you! In my opinion, I feel as a business owner it shouldn't be all about me — you'll see on our social media, our website etc, the



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honest takes some of the pressure off! I just do my job to the best of my ability and if everyone else does the same we have one awesome business.

As part of my series about the “How To Take Your Company From Good To Great”, I had the pleasure of interviewing Martin Dineen.

Martin Dineen the managing director of MJD Executive, which recruits for some of Australia’s most influential CEOs and top-level executives for major firms across the country.

Martin has 13 years of recruitment and client management experience in senior roles across Australia, the UK and Ireland. He founded MJD Executive in 2014 after identifying a need in the Australian market for business-critical support roles to be treated with the respect that they deserve.

Martin’s vision was to create a business that positively changed the lives of the individuals representing his brand, resulting in happy staff, satisfied clients, and content candidates. To date, the business has made over 1,700 placements for roles across Australia.

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Before we dive in, our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your ‘backstory’ and how you got started?

I started my recruitment career in 2008, I think it was just a few months shy of when Lehman Brothers, the investment company, collapsed. I really chose my timing — starting a career in recruitment just as the world was falling apart! However, when I look back on it in hindsight it was the best training I ever had, I didn’t know any different and it set me up for success. I assumed that when business developing, client



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wanted to see something build from the ground up, so I joined a start-up and stayed with that business long-term helping it grow it over a number of years, until I got the ‘itch’ and wanted to create something that was more of my own ‘flavour’.

Can you tell us a story about the hard times that you faced when you first started your journey? Did you ever consider giving up? Where did you get the drive to continue even though things were so hard?

I always knew that failure wasn’t an option, so I never even considered giving up. If it meant that I had to go from office to office knocking on doors I was going to do it and make it happen, but certainly there were hard times! Some of the more challenging periods, in hindsight, came when I was trying to navigate more of the personal side of things, such as finding balance. I was so driven to make the business a success that I rarely could find my ‘off switch’. I lived and breathed it 24/7, god bless my friends and family — it’s all I spoke about! As the business grew it became more exciting and I was so driven to continue the success that I didn’t give other things in life ‘a look in’. There was always that panic to just keep going hard, until one day I had an epiphany and thought “hold on, we’re generating revenue, we’re cashflow positive, our clients are happy, IT WORKS. I can now take some moments to enjoy the ride.”

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lessons or ‘takeaways’ you learned from that?

OMG I make mistakes every day and I love it, I own them and handle it in the most authentic of ways. We are only human right? A couple of weeks ago I was sending out our terms of engagement to a client and accidentally sent them my tax return from last year! The client saw the lighter side of the mistake and had a laugh with me, it’s all about the way you present yourself to people in my mind. We are perfectly flawed and allowing my staff to see this makes our team more authentic, engaged, and approachable to people, which I value a lot. Another thing that we look back on and have a chuckle about is the colour scheme and ‘style’ that was implemented initially for branding and the website. At that time black and ‘electric pink’ was on trend and I went for it, along with black and white photos, which we were later advised made us seem less ‘approachable’ — a fairly big mistake for a recruitment firm.



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an experience that is real. You will hear the word ‘authentic’ from me a lot as it is one of our strongest values and has been from day one. Whenever we did try hiring based on recruitment experience over our values, I won’t lie, we had some turnover. We immediately decided that it was better to hold back on the growth, take a step back and be patient with a slow and steady wins the race approach. We looked at people with highly transferrable skills from other industries and invested in training programmes that have been rated as second to none in recruitment. This coupled with clearly defined visions and values have made our own recruitment process highly successful. It’s not the easy way, it’s difficult being patient and delivering detailed and intensive training, but it’s also by far the most successful and enjoyable strategy we have put in place. We have managed to nurture and grow a super diverse team of differing personalities including introverts and extraverts who all align culturally and create an incredible vibe. The outcome has been way beyond anything I could have imagined.

Which tips would you recommend to your colleagues in your industry to help them to thrive and not “burn out”?

Have an off switch! In our industry, there is always ‘more’ to do. You might have good intentions but sometimes months just fly by without you raising your head from the desk or taking time out to rejuvenate. I believe in working 80% of the time and lasting a whole marathon rather than 100% and burning out. You get far better value and return from yourself, your staff and the business this way, no point sprinting the first 800 metres and collapsing with exhaustion at the end. Although my days can be full and busy, I get up at 4:45 every morning, I meditate, I go for a run on the beach before sunrise and have a swim before the rest of the world wakes. So, no matter what is thrown at me throughout the day I’ve had that “me time”!

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story?

When I first started the business, I had never experienced working from home before, so I got myself a computer from Dick Smith’s and set myself up in a serviced office environment. I sat myself down at my rented desk and thought “ok let’s give this a crack” and it just so happened that the person sitting opposite me was doing the same. I



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long before they did. We celebrated our wins together and were each other's 'shoulder to lean on' when things were tough. We still catch up to this day and share with each other what is happening for us in business and in life.

Ok thank you for all that. Now let's shift to the main focus of this interview. The title of this series is "How to take your company from good to great". Let's start with defining our terms. How would you define a "good" company, what does that look like? How would you define a "great" company, what does that look like?

For me, a 'good' company is one that has a decent culture, with clear career progression for staff and opportunities for organic growth too. One where individuals have access to the leaders of the business. From a sales perspective, I think it would come in on target 80% of the time and staff attrition would be natural, rather than for obvious reasons that suggest something is "broken". Benefits will be good, the brand powerful enough to target its market, and some organic growth plans to ensure nothing is stagnant. I am a firm believer in the saying 'you are either growing or dying'.

A 'great' business is where the passion is really obvious and infectious, for staff and for clients. I bounce out of bed to get to work every day as I love the energy we have at MJD and I am so driven to ensure my entire team feels the same way. Two of our company values are 'Beyond' and 'Authenticity'. We endeavour to go above and 'beyond' to help each other, as well as our key stakeholders, we also think about adding value 'beyond' personal gain which makes people feel incredibly engaged. Engaged people hit targets most of the time, which is what you want in a great business! Being 'authentic' is infectious and it encourages diversity, acceptance and builds a culture of 'support' rather than competition and this too is great. When the staff see the leadership team as authentic, they believe they have their back and this is where the real magic starts to happen.

Based on your experience and success, what are the five most important things one should know in order to lead a company from Good to Great? Please share a story or an example for each.

1. The business is not all about you!



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pressure off! I just do my job to the best of my ability and if everyone else does the same we have one awesome business

2. Be transparent

Transparency for me is everything, let your team see your vision and get excited by it. Let them truly see the value of what you are doing and where you are going. When I first started, I wanted to create a business where it was hard working, high performing but also fun, creating a positive impact on people lives both financially and spiritually.

3. Listen intently to motivators

Listen to and fully understand what makes your people tick, the days of one size fits all management is (I hope) behind us! Give plenty of trust, why not? The right people will embrace it, but if it's taken advantage of by the wrong people you quickly realise those who are not the right fit for your business and move on.

4. Have a modern day recruitment strategy

Recruit based on your values and train the rest (where possible). Dare I say, I don't focus intently on people's previous experience of our industry, I recruit individuals based on our company values. This is one of the key things to our organisation's success. One of my overused sayings in the office is "you can teach someone to print a document, but you can't teach them to care", that thought stays with me when I am sourcing new talent for my business and advising my clients on recruitment strategies for theirs.

5. Be loud and proud and make the market aware of who you are

Let the world know how great you are, keep your social media and marketing current, authentic, interesting and up to date. Show everyone and anyone what a great place you have to work in and attract similar like-minded talent to your team. And don't be afraid to splash a little cash on SEO — it will make the WORLD of difference to the brand awareness of your organisation.

Extensive research suggests that “purpose driven businesses” are more successful



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Having a purpose driven business means having more than a mission and vision statement that sits up on the wall. Purpose driven businesses use their goals and values to help guide their decision-making processes, remain on track and aligned with their staff from cleaner to CEO. It's so important to ensure that the vision is relatable to all staff, not just the management team, otherwise, how do you expect people to jump on board and be motivated? When the vision or purpose relates back to a personally driven motivator it becomes so authentic to people and makes them feel as though they are a part of something really special. I often remind my staff that one of the biggest visions I have had for this business from day one is that it creates a better lifestyle and stronger professional opportunities for the staff — and this is of course just so well received and appreciated. My vision connects our team, and this is so invaluable. It makes them happy to see me achieve my goals and allows them to feel an incredible sense of personal achievement.

What would you advise to a business leader who initially went through years of successive growth, but has now reached a standstill. From your experience do you have any general advice about how to boost growth and “restart their engines”?

I don't think this happens by accident, generally there will be something that's holding them back whether it's obvious or not. It might be a bit of burn out, the things that used to excite them now sometimes feel like a chore. They might be feeling a bit stagnant but unable to identify how to make that change or initiate that shift. As business owners, it can be hard to self-motivate in times like this, and there can feel like there's a lack of accountability. I've definitely been there, and I had to “reimagine” my vision and put a business plan in place to support it, breaking it down into really small pieces so it doesn't feel overwhelming or unachievable. What I start with is “ok in three years, what do I want my job to look like” and then work back from that until you have something in place down to a quarterly plan. Having a mentor too can be super helpful at times like this or implementing a board advisor or new board member. There's something about human nature that reacts quite well to accountability and new deadlines.

Generating new business, increasing your profits, or at least maintaining your financial stability can be challenging during good times, even more so during turbulent times. Can you share some of the strategies you use to keep forging



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good relationships with all our suppliers and keep contracts as flexible as possible. If the proverbial hits the fan we like to know that we can revert to a back-up plan that involves cutting unnecessary costs so we can keep our staff intact.

Generally, any recession we've seen in the last hundred years has been 18 months of pain, to help sleep comfortably at night I think it's a businessperson's responsibility to have an 18-month survival plan for a tough market; get your costs down as quickly as you can and ensure you have decent savings from your good times. Also, something people often lose sight of in a buoyant market is the need for constant focus on business development activities. In fact, it's even more crucial in a strong market as this is the time it is easier to get your foot in the door, not when it's difficult to get people to spend and commit to new relationships.

In your experience, which aspect of running a company tends to be most underestimated? Can you explain or give an example?

I'd probably say my initial thought to that question is around the amount of freedom I would get! I am a go to work and be in the office style of person, but upon setting up my business I thought I would be getting it to a point whereby I would do two days a week in the office and three days with my laptop from a different beach every day. I ended up six days in the office! Don't get me wrong I love every moment — but what I didn't realise was that with new people coming into the business and growth happening consistently I would need to be even more present and available, not less. In a small to medium-sized business, in particular, you can't take the owner out of the business and expect it to thrive if the owner is the one that drives the vision and mission.

As you know, “conversion” means to convert a visit into a sale. In your experience what are the best strategies a business should use to increase conversion rates?

Have real conversations with people. Try to see people face to face, it has so much more impact. It may be considered a little old school these days but it's so easy to delete an email or hang up the phone and forget someone. When you sit with another human and have real life conversations that is when real life connection happens. Another thing that is super important is to consult with integrity, I truly feel that if you do this you never need to sell a day in your life. Forget about the end goal of the 'sale' and think



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Of course, the main way to increase conversion rates is to create a trusted and beloved brand. Can you share a few ways that a business can earn a reputation as a trusted and beloved brand?

Again, consulting with integrity is vital here. If you try to push square pegs into round holes you cannot build trust. For us, being able to tailor our solutions rather than having a cookie-cutter approach has been challenging and often time consuming, but it has allowed us to earn the trust of our clients. They know we are listening and have the intent to support them in the way that they need to be supported, which means we value their business — that's how we get them to value us. When it comes to being beloved, that all boils back down to authenticity in our opinion. Particularly in recruitment, we are the first representation of our client's brands, they want us to be warm, engaging, inviting, vivacious and approachable — all the things that they would be when meeting new representatives that they are 'selling' to.

Great customer service and great customer experience are essential to build a beloved brand and essential to be successful in general. In your experience what are a few of the most important things a business leader should know in order to create a Wow! Customer Experience?

I think this is actually pretty simple but often gets overlooked, it goes back to what I said earlier about hiring on values. This will trickle into every part of your business including your stakeholders' experiences, clients and suppliers. If I hire someone who is right for my business and they love their job, generally our clients get to experience incredible customer service. If that same employee is kept engaged, challenged, and continues to love their job, your business enjoys the benefits of staff with longevity and your client experience is consistent. It is these engaged employees who are the ones that will go 'beyond' (another one of our values) and your clients get to reap the rewards through supreme customer service.

What are the most common mistakes you have seen CEOs & founders make when they start a business? What can be done to avoid those errors?

Let's be honest, a whole lot of us are control freaks. I see many CEO's & Founders try to hold on to way too much, especially when we first start a business, we want to have our



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rainmaking and this is where your skills lie, don't try to be across every little thing in the accounts department, let a great bookkeeper or Accountant do this for you and report in with vital information as needs be. Trying to be across everything that you are not necessarily highly skilled in is a recipe for disaster and will steal your 'mojo'. Focus on your strengths and where possible — 'outsource outsource outsource' and 'hire hire hire'! Oh, and have I mentioned having an off switch?

Thank you for all of that. We are nearly done. You are a person of great influence. If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

I would try to encourage everyone to try to take action towards their dreams and not just live a life in fantasy. They say ambition without action is fantasy. Take a tiny step, create a little action every single day and your life (and business) can be what you never imagined. Sometimes it's two steps forward and one step backwards and that's ok, as long as you commit to keep moving forward.

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This was very inspiring. Thank you so much for the time you spent with this!





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