

# The Busiest Man in Optics

Chris Beer is the CEO Luxottica Retail. He has established successful teams and businesses in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, South Africa and has just taken over the broader Asia Pacific region and greater China. He is responsible for a staff of 8,500 and 1,350 retail stores. He is arguably the busiest man in optics. How does such a busy person fit everything into their Blackberry and keep a good work/life balance? We asked **Chris Beer** himself to explain.

A healthy body makes a healthy mind and knowing the enormous task confronting me each day I start the day at around 5am with exercise, followed by breakfast and arrive at the office between before 7am and 7.30am.

I feel that the preparation for the day is most important – grabbing a peppermint tea, I spend the first part of the day looking up the previous day's sales figures and checking Luxottica's share price.

Thanks to the great organisational skills of my Executive Assistant (EA), Shirley Harris, my day's schedule is booked fairly tightly but always with flexibility for unexpected meetings.

Luxottica has a lot of projects underway in the region and I have 18 direct reports, including Australia, New Zealand, Southeast Asia, South Africa and Greater China, so it's important I manage time efficiently.

Clearly, technology helps bridge the gap between work, home and the demands of

travel. To this end, I fall in the Blackberry camp. The iPhone is great for play but, for me, the Blackberry is the only indispensable tool for doing business on the road.

#### Family and Work/Life Balance

Family is most important to me. Despite my early starts, I always make a point of talking to my three children first thing in the morning (no matter where I am in the world or what time zone I'm in) before immersing myself into my work day.

As the regional role expands for Luxottica's team in Australia, my overseas travel has increased. I'm travelling about one week in every three and manage my work-life around what suits my family and I. When I'm in the office I leave no later than 6pm so I can have dinner with the family and on weekends devote myself entirely to them.

I wouldn't be able to do my role without the support of others. My wife makes sure our family life doesn't suffer and the work/life

equation stays healthy and my EA, Shirley co-ordinates my work and travel schedules around key family commitments and ensures those who need to see me do so.

I don't necessarily expect my team to follow my work pattern. It's more important they find the work/life balance that helps them best to get their job done and that I foster a flexible environment to support that.

#### Leadership Style

In managing people I follow a few simple principles: be respectful of other people's time, treat each interaction or meeting of the day as importantly as any other, be decisive and give others space to shine.

As CEO my attention is spread across all operations for which we have responsibility. Different issues occupy the focus of our management at different times. At the moment my priorities are on initiatives to develop talent and improve the customer experience, as well as our five-year growth plan for the region.

Once a week I meet with my executive team as a group to make sure we're on track with our plans. We have agreed on a clear vision for the business and the strategy to achieve this, so it's important we are all accountable. Fortnightly, I'll also meet one-on-one with my direct reports for more detailed focus and feedback.

I see monthly reports as overly bureaucratic however, I do expect all my executive team to be across all aspects of their responsibilities and to be able to answer any question or access required information quickly if required. I expect them to lead by example by raising the bar in performance and in growing and developing talent.

When working with a new region, or on a new venture, I lead the team with my



## Key Influences

**Inspirational:** Jonathan Welch, the music director of the Choir of Hope and Inspiration (formerly Choir of Hard Knocks). His tireless dedication to the homeless is amazing. I feel very humbled in his presence.

**Business:** Jack Welch, an outstanding people-focused CEO. He places great importance in having a corporate culture that supports and encourages performance and results for the business and its employees.

**Sport:** Andrea Agassi in his ability to become the best in the world, take a fall and then reinvent himself and get back on top – it's a life lesson for us all.

**Personal:** Brad Sugars; he is 35 years old and a self-made multi-millionaire. He's highly entrepreneurial with an unwavering can-do attitude. To speak and interact with him is invigorating.

vision for that country and the bigger picture goals for the region.

I spend as much time as needed to move the key people to a level of comfort in what they need to do. Once I know that's working, I will step back for the country manager or executive responsible to lead. After that, I am still involved but more in an overview way.

I need to be able to balance the risks with the opportunities. One of my roles is to facilitate expansion of the company in the region. I believe there are enormous opportunities for growth and am genuinely passionate about growing Luxottica's presence where it makes sense to do so.

In some markets we will partner with an existing organisation to leverage growth. Each market is handled differently, depending on the local culture and challenges faced.

I am also very conscious of maintaining my company's premier position in the marketplace. The customer is fundamental to any 'market position'. We have strong brands and a broad range of products to suit the range of customers that we have.

Our challenge, as with any business, is to stay ahead of what the customer wants, stay loyal to our brands and our product offerings – both in the optical and the sunglass space.

To stay abreast of the markets in which we operate, I read widely about economic, political and social trends in different parts of the world. I enjoy understanding different cultures and how best to interact with them.

#### Motivation

What drives and motivates me at work is growing the Luxottica's eye care and eyewear business within the region to its full potential. I like to take businesses and make them bigger and having the ability, autonomy and team that inspires and pushes me as we seek new opportunities for growth.

Success is often judged by others and if a person tries to chase it they can become lonely and lose focus on what is really important. In my view, people who seek money and power are not in the business for the right reasons.

I belong to a number of different business network groups and try to draw on these relationships to learn from the experiences

of other people. Personally I'm very comfortable saying "I don't know, but let's find out". I look more broadly to global retail and consumer trends, beyond the optical industry, as a source of new concepts that can be adapted for our business in Australia.

#### Mottos For Life

A motto I try to live by is: "A full heart for the fully committed". For those who are committed to the cause (and the course) I will give them 100 per cent of my heart to work and support them so they develop and grow to be the best they can be and realise their full potential.

While not actually a motto, a saying that's important to me is: "For every person you lead they have a responsibility for ten others". They could be children, parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts.

In the region for which I'm responsible there are around 8,000 team members and, together, they are responsible for 80,000 people. This is a very good reason for me to get out of bed each day and be better than I was the day before. ■

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