

Karyn Cooper: An employee who has been going places

CBH has a unique history of valuing and sustaining important associations and relationships, which make it the special company that it has become today.

This article is about a remarkable but not as well-known story, of a relationship between the West Perth Rostrum Club 19, a public speaking club and CBH which has been existed over the past 22 years. Over this time this small organisation has hosted a weekly meeting early every Friday morning in CBH's premises in West Perth – for the first few years in the former CBH head office further down Delhi Street and then ever since CBH's move into its new head office.

This story is about one of our employees, Karyn Cooper and her impressive journey through attending Rostrum and of her growth in confidence by practising public speaking and presentation skills and being coached through her membership of Club 19, such that her achievements that culminated in her being awarded the Club's Most improved speaker award for 2016.

This is regarded as a serious trophy that is only awarded on merit. You may also be able to see in the photo of the impressive trophy that Karyn is holding, that there are also names of a number of other former notable CBH employees amongst recipients, who have also past been awarded this in previous years.

It is important to acknowledge that the Rostrum Club 19 story has happened because of the realisation by a number of its former members, including Imre Mencshelyi, who is of course is well-known to the CBH community and who subsequently became CEO, that Club 19 offered a quite unique self-development opportunities for CBH employees who wanted to attend its meetings. This is a relationship which continued through the years and has been nurtured and supported by CBH's present CEO Dr Andy Crane.

As you would imagine, over these more than two decades of the CBH-Rostrum Club 19 relationship, there has been a steady number of employees who have gone to weekly hour long meetings before they have started their working day. CBH demonstrates its support for any employees who want to attend the Club 19 meetings by underwriting the modest Rostrum six-monthly membership fee. The rest, as they say, is up to the individual, with each person mapping out how they will complete the 12 stages of the Rostrum Personal development program (PDP) .

When Karyn joined Club 19 she had realised that she felt she needed to enhance and develop her skills and confidence in her role at CBH in organisational development and driving the change agenda so that she could become effective. She had set herself a goal of presenting the results from some organisational research at the ANZ Academic Management Conference, an outcome from her Masters in Organisation Development and HR, which she graduated in 2016 from Southern Cross University after six years of hard work on a part-time basis.

The Rostrum PDP includes some steps as a person progresses through it at their own pace, for the presentation of longer and more demanding speeches in terms of time and preparation, which in Karyn's case was an invaluable opportunity to test run her conference presentation as part of her Rostrum PDP.

As her confidence grew Karyn learnt tips from doing regular presentations at Club 19 meetings, so that she learnt strategies to minimise being distracted by nervousness, how to use notes effectively, how to use voice projection and modulation to engage an audience and other arts of public speaking such as stance, gestures to emphasise specific points in a speech and eye contact.

Karyn found that these skills all fed back into and were relevant to actual work related situations she was starting to take on with more and more confidence, such as co-presentations with the CEO on issues related to gender diversity. She is able now to make balanced and well-crafted contributions at meetings also on issues like promoting and sustaining career progression for women working in agriculture.

There are other examples of her year of growth and learning in Rostrum was being able to present a speech to the student body of her alma-mater, Perth College. Rostrum also conducts public speaking events for members of all Rostrum clubs to participate in, such as its annual speaker of the year competition. In 2016 Karyn entered into this competition, which involved presenting an 8 minute speech. This is no small feat let me assure you! Indeed, Karyn did so well through the heats that she reached the finals.

Karyn has learnt much from her Rostrum journey as it has progressed and been able to call upon important and entertaining moments in her life through speeches by sharing humorous and thoughtful reflections.

Like many of the other people who making speeches and presentations at Rostrum meetings, Karyn has learnt from observation of how to incorporate formative influences from your life into speeches to entertain and connect with an audience. She was able to share, for instance, when she did her first speech, her PDP 1, the so-called 'About me' speech about the wonderful example she saw in her mother's journey to becoming a competent business owner by taking being the manager of a TAB shop.

Greg Swensen (May 2017)