

Name

Suzanne Ravenall

Company name

Beyond Outsourcing Global Holdings

Type of business

Business transformation outsourcing

Business title

Group Chief Executive Officer

Job description

Responsible for the growth, direction and strategy of the organisation, and for delivering on shareholder's requirements

Age

39

Years of experience

10 in current position

Academic qualifications

7 'O' levels from Stratton School, Bedfordshire, England

First job

Hogg Robinson Travel in the United Kingdom

Mentor

No single mentor, but enjoys the teachings of great leaders

Best management decision

Realising that she could create a business from scratch and then restructuring it to enter the business transformation outsourcing space



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Constantly a step ahead

MANAGEMENT STYLE AND QUALITIES

Ravenall sees mentoring as an important element of leadership, and it forms a vital part of the management strategy within Beyond Outsourcing. She stresses the difference between mentoring and training, noting that outside of instructive teaching, people also need guidance. 'Mentoring is about understanding people's challenges, where they're going and where they're coming from and helping them to get onto the right track. It's about

Opposite right *Believing is seeing. Suzanne Ravenall's unwavering vision has turned the dream of Beyond Outsourcing into a thriving reality.*



Worst management decision

Making decisions about people or employees that have turned out to be the wrong choice

Toughest moment

The initial setting up of the business was a challenging time, with financing and renting accommodation as a non-South African national proving difficult

Time-out activities

Playing with her four dogs and pottering around in her garden

Favourite quote

‘Cherish your visions and your dreams as they are the children of your soul; the blueprint of your ultimate achievements’

– Napoleon Hill

Retirement destination

Somewhere on the beach

life skills, not just business skills,’ she says, pointing out that most challenges within business lead back to personal issues or lack of a particular life skill. Mentoring not only focuses on the symptom, but also identifies and deals with the root cause of challenges that arise.

‘When I first started the company I was excited and passionate and I wanted to make a difference and add value to people. If you lose any of those core components, you lose it completely’

Ravenall believes that wisdom increases with age, as does finesse, and that through her years in the business, she has been able to add new skills to her armory. Qualities that she values include discipline, execution and tenacity. She also prizes the ability to spot talent and pick the right person for the job, and believes that talent management and personal development are key areas in which a good CEO should be involved. Having built her successful business without having tertiary education qualifications herself, Ravenall values personality, capability and a can-do attitude above qualifications, and says that with the skills shortage facing South African

businesses, one needs to choose people with the correct behaviour and be prepared to train them up. Accordingly, Beyond Outsourcing has developed a sophisticated talent management strategy that starts right from recruitment, and includes constant assessments and reviews, all of which focus on measurable outcomes and encouraging personal growth.

Ravenall admits that she is ‘good at asking difficult questions’ which others tend to shy away from, and her honesty and openness have become a cornerstone of the strong corporate culture at Beyond Outsourcing, which places high importance on transparency, accountability, responsibility and innovation. Recognising that an employee’s perception of the company is his or her reality, Ravenall has implemented procedures that ensure that each employee is involved in the decision-making processes that affect his or her department, and even the business as a whole, whether it’s through one-on-one meetings with managers (who subscribe to an open-door policy), departmental forums or the monthly staff surveys

that are included on employees’ electronic payslips.

Ravenall has adopted a similar inclusive approach to relationships with shareholders, which comprises clear and continuous communication, as well as recognising their involvement and role in the business’s ongoing success.

WORK PHILOSOPHY

Ravenall believes that she has mellowed somewhat over the years, but maintains that her attitude towards business remains unchanged. ‘When I first started the company I was excited and passionate and I wanted to make a difference and add value to people. If you lose any of those core components, you lose it completely,’ she says, adding that while her general goals stay the same, over time these have broadened to incorporate a desire to give back to the community, which she couldn’t really afford the time to do in the beginning.

MANAGING THE BALANCE

As in business, Ravenall believes that personal time requires careful planning and organisation. ‘It won’t happen on



its own,' she says. 'You have to think about how you want to plan it and manage it even more ferociously than business because it's easy to let things that relate to your own time slide.' As an example of how she puts this strategy into action, Ravenall explains that she goes away every eight weeks or so from a Thursday to the following Monday. She schedules these breaks into her diary as she would a business commitment, and treats them in the same way. She also outsources time-consuming activities and errands like grocery shopping to free up her timetable outside of work.

REASON FOR EXCELLENCE

One of the chief reasons that Beyond Outsourcing has achieved success over the years is Ravenall's ability to identify and plan for almost all of the challenges that come its way, whether they are big or small, and her insistence on measurable outcomes. She views challenges as an opportunity for growth, and laughingly points out that if there were no problems facing businesses, there would be no need for managers.

Some of the challenges that have

come her way are those facing all South African businesses: severe skills shortages and the effective implementation of BEE. Beyond Outsourcing's foresight and planning have allowed it to deal with these issues without panicking or finding itself on the back foot. The company's dedication to plotting all possible scenarios and obstacles, and having risk mitigation actions in place, has paid off time and time again. Ravenall observes that, 'most challenges go away if you have already considered how to address them.'

'Most challenges go away if you have already considered how to address them'

In the case of black economic empowerment (BEE), Ravenall and the company began to look at effective implementation five years ago, and Beyond Outsourcing currently has an EmpowerDEX rating of 'A', with around 80% of its procurement coming from BEE suppliers.

While she admits that the skills shortage remains a challenge, Ravenall says,

'When people have asked why we would hire people and train them up if some of these are going to move on, I always say, "Imagine we brought those people onboard and didn't train them, and they stayed on!" What impact would this have on the company and the client then!'

In Ravenall's opinion, the biggest challenge facing Beyond Outsourcing is to communicate the concept of business transformation outsourcing (BTO), which is relatively new in South Africa, to the market.

Since she first founded the company as an operations execution business in 1997, Ravenall has always been a few steps ahead of the marketplace. Her decision right at its inception to bet on a future market that did not yet exist (BTO was then as yet unheard of) and to concentrate on being a manufacturer of the product rather than a retailer, have stood the company in great stead, and meant that today it is three years ahead of the market and unmatched in its offering – generic and scalable toolkits consisting of processes, methodologies and systems that provide sustainable business transformation.

In the past 18 months, after nearly nine years of patient waiting, the company entered its sales cycle, and is tackling front-end sales for the first time. Ravenall notes while this has its own challenges, the business predicts its annual turnover will double this year due to its success in this new arena.

LOOKING FORWARD

Ravenall reveals that the company is moving into larger joint risk and reward ventures with its clients, which she says will be an interesting space for the business. Another new development is that members of the organisation will soon be able to buy-in. Staff will be able to own equity, allowing them to be anchored into the business and to earn extra money.

On future challenges that may face the business, Ravenall is seemingly casual, pointing out that obstacles, both big and small, are inevitable. Her relaxed attitude stems from the knowledge that Beyond Outsourcing has experienced (and triumphed over) many challenges in the past, through its ability to plan ahead and make quick decisions, and that it is set to continue in



the same vein. 'We look for the challenges – both small and big – and we plan for them,' she says, simply.

Beyond Outsourcing continues its mission of making BTO better known in South Africa, through educating the market, speaking on the conference circuit, appearances in recognised and

esteemed publications and through various other marketing programmes, focusing particularly on informing people about the importance of growing supplier partnership mentality, which Ravenall says is a concept of 'working together' that is accepted globally, but is still evolving in South Africa.

EMPLOYEE QUOTES

'Suzanne is an absolutely dynamic and motivated person. I really admire her – starting the business from scratch and getting it to where it is today is phenomenal, and the plans she has for the future are so exciting.'

– *Tania Janse Van Vuuren, Human Resources Administrator*

'The first part of what makes Suzanne a great manager is her total commitment to people and their growth, and the second part is her honesty and major amounts of insight based on her personal experience.'

– *Diana Grant, Brand, PR and Marketing Coordinator*

'Personally, I think Suzanne's most outstanding quality is how dynamic she is. She has a solution for every problem. She looks at every situation from the perspective that there are always options and so she never gets stuck – there's an answer to every challenge. And she has an open-door policy, which means anyone can talk to her when they need to.'

– *Louis Visser, Operations Manager*

Local competitive business environment

Since it was first launched as IDCS in 1997, as a company that built generic and scaleable proprietary software and processes for operations execution, the business has literally been in a league of its own. The first operator in its particular outsourcing field, IDCS was ahead of its time, as is the Beyond Outsourcing of today.

Roughly three years ahead of the market, the company is currently without competitors. While there are hundreds of businesses offering various outsourcing services, there are none that can claim to provide sustainable business transformation through the use of the generic and scalable toolkit that is Beyond Outsourcing's main differentiator.

Offering operational excellence around implementation, a managed services factory vehicle for the purpose of predictable outcomes, a mixture of private equity and managed services, a total business solution across the consulting value chain (including consultation, designing, building, running and enabling through IT) and management methodology of predictable outcomes, measured at each process level to ensure delivery, Beyond Outsourcing is able to meet and exceed its clients' performance expectations time and time again.

International achievements

Ravenall reveals that Beyond Outsourcing has plans to move into the international arena, with increasing its footprint in Africa being a priority. The company is investigating an expansion into Nigeria at some point in the future, but Ravenall is firm on the fact that the business won't rush into anything, saying, 'We have shareholders in Nigeria, but right now we have a massive focus on South Africa. When we make our move, it needs to be the right opportunity. We're taking our time and going slowly to be effective.'

She also hopes to one day see the company establish a presence in the United Kingdom, but says that before it opens the doors of any new branches, the company needs to recruit the right leaders to manage the new operations, which she notes may take some time.

While the company has no intention of setting up a series of offices around the world, it recognises that the marketplace is changing with the development of technology and that content is becoming very important in this new arena. Accordingly, Beyond Outsourcing is considering turning its tools into a package that people can use themselves, and providing licences to organisations around the world, without actually having a physical presence in those nations.