

## 2018 Rob Goffee Leadership Development Award

### WINNER: Zendesk Australia

#### The Illuminate Leadership Series

##### Origins and principles

Zendesk is a leading global provider of cloud-based customer service software. When Zendesk celebrated its 10th birthday, something triggered in the psyche of the tribe, and especially those that lead it: “We are no longer a scrappy little start up.” Over the two years prior, the Zendesk Australia team had grown 58%, and continues to be a key team in an increasingly complex global ecosystem of more than 2,700 employees spread across 15 other markets. The structure was mixed between linear, formal reporting; and indirect, matrixed relationships.

As a start-up, a natural state of organised disorder existed. As a result, a basic level of stability and focus was needed to deliver operational and strategic precision through reliability, consistency, and clarity of purpose and direction. Zendesk was moving through a combined phase of operational stability and high-performance growth. While continuing to evolve the product portfolio and employees’ own professional growth, a need arose for increased standardisation and specialisation. This would solve many of the growing pains from moving to scrappy start-up to sophisticated enterprise, yet can create new challenges such as siloed operations, disconnection and conformity, which was “so not Zendesk”.

As the teams continued to grow, there was a need to work hard to maintain operational stability, whilst remaining connected and true to their unique identity. It was critical to broaden partnerships and shared responsibilities, and not just within Zendesk, but to customers, shareholders, teams, and the cultivation of the distinctive organisational culture. In order to keep growing as an organisation, there was a need to improve how opportunities for cross-functional collaboration were identified: be clearer in the roles each person, team, and function plays; and more precise in the scope of individual and collective responsibilities. More structured communication needed to be developed, and the company needed to be increasingly energised towards efforts which would deliver the greatest returns.

At times, Zendesk needed to let go of the things they once cared about most, but which were now holding them back, and be ready to grab the reins of rapid change with a sense of excitement and optimism. Collaboration needed to move beyond nice, thoughtful intentions, to involve others and be more transparent. There was a need to facilitate genuine, trusting connections and interactions between teams to better achieve common goals, and identify duplication and inefficiency whilst increasing flexibility and freedom to innovate. If Zendesk hoped to reproduce and extend upon the widespread success of past achievements, it was critical to move forward together and become closer than ever within the existing culture. This is where Zendesk’s emerging leaders and key influencers needed to play a key role in creating genuine impact with and for employees.

##### Implementation

To continue to foster the business vision and nurture the unique culture, **Illuminate** was designed to reflect the values and behaviours articulated by the workforce which define high-performing, inspirational leadership. Each module of the series encourages increasing self and social-awareness,

alongside methodologies which add to the leadership toolkit (i.e. the right tool, for the right person, at the right time).

In the series, methods of supporting critical conversations are explored to foster a culture of regular, open and honest communication. They cover the need to sometimes have difficult conversations with kindness and respect, which support individual and collective safety, while remaining both agile and present. To support these conversations, individual differences and preferences for communication and activity are explored through the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) to build greater awareness of personal styles and triggers that aid in the understanding of team drivers and needs, and how to adapt and flex to those needs.

One of the identified strengths of the most admired leaders is their ability to coach. The series examines common coaching methodologies, including GROW - which is the model of choice at Zendesk for goal-setting and tactical planning - using a series of games to measure one's ability to coach, as opposed to teaching, telling or mentoring; and to become better at selecting the right tool for the right job. From this experience, each leader is invited to join the regional coaching circle kick-off, after which they are introduced to a circle of peers from across the region, including members from the Manila and Singapore offices. Circles meet monthly for a period of no less than six months, after which time now-experienced coaches join the regional coaching network - a place to seek coaching support, and to further practice and take advantage of peer coaching. Not only does this provide an opportunity for peer-learning, but simultaneously grows each person's coaching capabilities. After four to six months within a circle, the increasingly capable coaches are then invited to join the Regional Coaching Network - a broader network of skilled internal coaches at Zendesk who can be responsive to and support just-in-time individual or group coaching needs.

The series also explores the art and science of strengths-finding. Using the Clifton Strengths instrument, participants examine their own strengths and explore how these relate to motivation and sense of value and success. This learning is then applied to each leader's team to begin creating a greater understanding of how each team's strengths may be better leveraged, and how to deploy them to their areas of passion and strength.

In direct response to the series cohort's feedback, new experiences are planned that explore the Multipliers/Diminishers Framework, Team Resilience and Emotional Intelligence, using the EQ-i 2.0.

The series acts as a feeder program to other Zendesk programs, like:

- Accelerate - 'experiences for tactical, senior leaders'
- Elevate- 'experiences for strategic, executive leaders'
- Ever wise - 'global mentoring program for high performing and high potential, future female leaders of Zendesk'

In addition to these, Zendesk's People Development team provides internal one-on-one coaching to emerging and future leaders. This coaching is delivered by those with formal coaching qualifications.

Zendesk provides an ever-growing range and number of learning streams, with each specifically linked by principle and methodology to ensure consistency of learning across each stream, create common languages at all levels of the organisation, and to also enable progress in learning.

### Benefits and Outcomes

A number of metrics are utilised to measure the success of the series.

**Program Engagement:** A cultural marker of success, reflected in the many leaders and influencers that remain in the program, within their coaching circle, the wider coaching network, and/or as program mentor. From program commencement in 2017, nearly a third (31%) of all alumni have remained active.

**Program Satisfaction & NPS:** Average program satisfaction for 2017 was 73.81%, which increased to 89.17% in 2018. The program net promoter score for 2017 was +89.47, which moved to +100 in 2018.

**Alumni Advancement:** Since its inception in 2017, 54% of all program alumni have received offers of advancement to more senior leadership positions.

**Leadership & Workplace Satisfaction:** 99% of respondents would recommend working at Zendesk Australia to a friend with overall satisfaction rates at 4.9/5, culture and values rate at 4.8/5 and leadership confidence at 4.6/5. These data points represent the strongest engagement measures of any of Zendesk's 16 offices globally.

**Employee Engagement & Loop (360° performance feedback) Trends:** Employee engagement is measured via Pulse Survey and Loop Trends, forming direct staff feedback opportunities, offered in direct and 360° formats. In 2018, *internal leadership and development activities* were rated by respondents in Australia as the most impacting factor in their satisfaction at Zendesk. It was specifically called out in qualitative data, and was the highest clustering theme out of all data collected. In 2018, Zendesk teams rated a *sense of encouragement, support and empowerment from their leaders* as the second most satisfying engagement factor, which was consistent with results from its 2017 survey.

A summary of the top 5 qualitative themes to emerge for Zendesk Australia in 2017 included:

- Great internal leadership and development opportunities
- Great work-life blend and workplace flexibility
- Love of colleagues and empowering leaders
- Great workplace collaboration and high trust
- "WE LOVE THE ZENDESK CULTURE"

### Summary

As Zendesk grows its revenue and customer base in excess of 40% year on year, they are also expanding their complex global ecosystem of more than 2,700 employees. Leaders must remain confident yet humble, capable of translating strategy into agile practice, encourage freedom of expression and ongoing experimentation, while remaining respectful of the company's roots and enabling a healthy evolution of tribal culture.

To continue to foster the business vision and nurture the unique culture, **illuminate** both embodies and nurtures the values and behaviours articulated by the workforce which define high-performing, inspirational leadership. The program encourages increasing self and social-awareness, alongside methodologies which add to the leadership toolkit.

There is no end-point, and cohorts engage in the experience for between 6 to 12 months, with many remaining indefinitely as a mentor or coach.

Markers of success include engagement, advancement, 360° feedback, and local leadership satisfaction. Since inception, 54% of participants have received offers to advance their careers.