

- Jul 9 2018 at 11:00 PM
- Updated Jul 9 2018 at 11:00 PM

What it takes to be a BOSS young executive



Boss Young

Executives judges (left to right) Nerida Caesar, Bonnie Boezeman, and Michael Rebelo. **Louie Douvis**



by [Sally Patten](#)

Leaders of today need to be more flexible and resilient than they were 15 years ago, say the judges of this year's *BOSS* Young Executives awards, now in their 15th year.

"Learn fast, fail fast, fix fast. That kind of mentality, I think, is something that we are seeing as a leadership theme that you probably weren't looking for 15 years ago," said Michael Rebelo, chief executive of advertising group Publicis Communications in Australia and New Zealand and one of the three judges of the 2018 awards.

The six winners of the [BOSS Young Executives awards](#), run in conjunction with human resources consulting firm DDI (Development Dimensions International), will be revealed this Friday in [BOSS magazine](#). Of the 90 previous winners, 14 per cent are now chief executives, while 22 per cent are in the C-suite.

Compared with 2004, the first year the awards were run, today's leaders also needed to be technically savvy, have sound financial skills and a good knowledge of the regulatory environment, the judges said.

Our Young Executives 2017 (from left) Suzie Riddell, Clayton Pyne, Liam Hayes, Huw Longman, Jade Little, and Adriana Saw. **Nic Walker**

Inspirational Leadership

But the three judges said it was the softer skills that are now also far more important.

Part of the challenge in the 2010s, given the changing attitudes towards long-term, stable employment, was retaining staff, they noted. This required an ability to inspire people.

"If they feel inspired by the CEO, they're gonna love their job, and they're going to really put in as many hours as it takes to really make him or her happy. If you really love the person you work for, why would you look around?" said Bonnie Boezeman, chair of e-commerce group ShopReply and another judge.

The other issue was that staff might well be working remotely, making it harder for the boss to walk the floor, gauge the mood and talk to individual staff members.



Boss Young Executives 2016 (from left) James Cudmore, Natalie Ruuska, Carlo Bellini, Felicity Furey and Anushka Weeratunga. **Louise Kennerley**

"The past was leadership by observation. Today it's leadership by inspiration," said Andrew Warren-Smith, managing director of DDI Australia.

"People didn't talk about inspiration years ago," Ms Boezeman added.

The judges argued that in addition to inspiring staff, leaders needed to be able to coach them in an effort to retain them, because money was not necessarily the key.

"People need to be inspired, but they also need to learn from that individual. [Employees are thinking]: 'Am I going to get skills? Am I going to learn something that's going to set me up better for tomorrow?' " Mr Warren-Smith said.



Five of the 2004 Boss Young Executives cohort: Cheryl Chantry, Scott Charters, Susie George, Sally Bruce, Michael Rebelo. **Peter Braig**

Disruption & Transformation

Nerida Caesar, a director of Westpac and former chief executive of consumer credit reporting agency Equifax who was also a judge, said it was vital that leaders were technology savvy and understood the way in which technology could disrupt their own companies, as well as their industry and customers.

Mr Rebelo agreed. "Every industry is having some level of the two lovely catchphrases: disruption or transformation. No matter where you sit, today's leadership is having to deal with that and I think that's something that we wouldn't have seen 15 years ago," he said.

Ms Caesar argued that leaders needed a sound understanding of the ever-changing regulatory environment and accounting standards, which were more complicated today than they were 15 years ago.

"You need to have a great IQ and EQ to process what's going on. [There is such a] volume of information and data. How do you cut through it and make the right choices for your company? I think [you need] a great strategic brain," she said.

Ms Boezeman added that leaders today needed to continue to educate themselves. They could no longer assume they deserved the job because it was "their turn".

She said: "A lot of it was the old boys' club. A lot of it was basically 'I'm next in line'."