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2. Use your voice to challenge others.
3. Create a better future.

Be the change you want to see.

RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOURS



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RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOURS

Raising the Bar

BlueScope 'Respect is How We Work' program, making prevention far better than the cure

INTRODUCTION

Behaviour change is hard, especially when it relates to uncomfortable conversations on topics people would rather not have. One company that has made huge strides on inclusivity is NAWO member, BlueScope, which has taken a whole-of-organisation approach to respect at work. The company attributes much of its success to the relatable tone taken in its integrated program, the cornerstone of which is its ‘Respect is How We Work’ program.

Here Laura Towey, National Employee Relations and Experience Manager at BlueScope, and one of the program creators, shares her insights and learnings, including their ethos, which was a key starting point:

“Everyone comes to work wanting to contribute something meaningful, build good relationships and leave feeling proud of what they’ve achieved. No one sets out to do harm. And when something does go wrong, it usually started from something small in the past that has escalated over time. Imagine if, at that first opportunity, someone had had the courage and ability to say, ‘Maybe reconsider that’. Our society and our expectations have evolved. This program defines what respect looks like and gives everyone the tools, skills and abilities they need to manage those difficult conversations so we can create a positive workplace experience for everyone.”

AN ENDURING COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

As Australia's largest steel provider, BlueScope plays a pivotal role in the nation's economy, through its vast product output, as a direct employer of the approximately 7000 across 100 sites and through the ripple effect it creates within the surrounding communities and businesses.

BlueScope has long been committed to fostering a workplace culture that values respect, inclusivity and engagement. This commitment is embodied in its 'Our Bond' statement created in 2003 when the company was formed out of BHP. Developed by employees, it identifies key stakeholders – its people, customers, shareholders and communities – and guides how they should work together and conduct business with integrity and mutual respect.



Complementing 'Our Bond', is BlueScope's broader ASP (Australian Steel Products) Strategy, which serves as the company's true north, and seeks to embed values of respect and fairness in day-to-day operations and create a workplace where everyone can be the best version of themselves.

Leveraging this foundation, the company has driven meaningful progress, particularly in increasing the number of women in its business, especially in its operational areas.

CHANGING TIMES

Even with this strong commitment, evolving complexities were impacting BlueScope's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts. As a company with a high number of acquired businesses under a federated model, size alone brings challenges.

Additionally, as Laura highlights, "We're managing a transitioning workforce—from predominantly long-serving men who've never worked anywhere else, to a multi-generational team with diverse expectations. Combine that with societal shifts around acceptable behaviour and increased compliance demands, from Respect@Work and changes to anti-discrimination laws and the Psychosocial Code of Practice, and it's clear we have a significant task at hand."

DRIVING FORCE



KEY LEARNING

Aligned approach is essential.

Fortunately, Laura wasn't alone in recognising the broad scope of the challenges faced and their cross functional nature. A collaboration was formed with some "really phenomenal colleagues" including Anna Di Giorgio, Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Brendan Smith, Head of Organisational Development and Learning and Stephen Norbury, Health and Safety Manager and their teams.

Between them, the group crossed over in many areas including DEI, Psychosocial Safety and employee

relations, for initiatives like Respect@Work, and in addressing the critical area of intersectionality.

As Laura explains, “It is a core concept because it recognises that individuals have multiple, overlapping identities – gender, race, sexuality, disability, age – that create unique challenges or compounded disadvantages, especially in relation to discrimination, harassment and exclusion. As such it is a key focus for us so that we ensure that BlueScope’s workplace initiatives are more equitable and responsive to the diverse realities of the workforce and foster a more inclusive and respectful environment.”

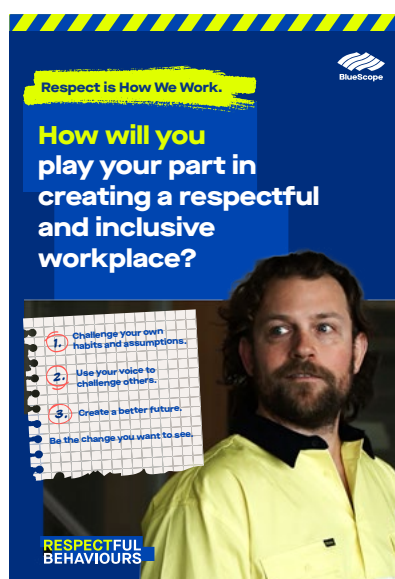
As Laura points out, “The four of us combined forces to create a holistic program that reinforces the same messages in different ways over and over again. So, it's not 50 million pieces of information you've got to take in. It's an integrated package of tools, guidelines and education that I would have valued when I was working within one of our businesses, designed to support the intersectionality of our people.”

Reflecting on the complexity: “Initially we didn’t know ‘how to eat the elephant’. Where do you start in a business that is 100 years old and has all these pockets of different levels of stuff going on? How do you explain it in multiple languages to all of these different people? It's a hard ask. It's our job to help our people navigate that one bite at a time, really successfully because people get really scared by words like psychosocial safety, sexual harassment and bullying. They conjure up the worst-case scenarios. Really, it’s about respect. That's it. It's plain and simple.”

As a starting point to address an immediate need to tackle low incident reporting, BlueScope revamped its 'Speak Up' hotline to include both business and people-related concerns, such as harassment. They introduced new reporting channels, anti-harassment guidelines and trauma-informed investigation training to ensure that employees felt safe to report issues.



RESPECT IS HOW WE WORK - A MULTIFACETED ON DEMAND, LEARNING ANYTIME PROGRAM



At the core of the Respect is How We Work program is BlueScope’s global code of conduct, from which hang three programs of work all designed to reinforce the essential notion of respect.

1. Step Up designed to foster team-based, face-to-face discussions about key topics like inclusivity and respect. The goal is for teams to create a manifesto outlining the standards they will hold themselves to.
2. Empowering Health & Safety Teams – Leading Health and Wellbeing Module, which introduces all leaders to the concepts of psychosocial safety. This program recently won the Australian Work Health and Safety Award for Best WHS Learning and Development Program for 2024.
3. Respectful Behaviours - a baseline eLearning education for all employees, which has become the true cornerstone of BlueScope’s efforts. In recognition of its success, it received a commendation for excellence in the 2024 AID Awards for ‘Best Use of Gamification or Simulation for Learning’.

RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOURS – SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Key feedback from other learning interventions was that making any new eLearning program mandatory would lead to resistance – and that employees had a strong dislike for traditional eLearning. As Laura shares, “It gets people’s backs up. They think it’s HR puff and that stuff is being rolled out to them because they’re broken and need to be fixed in some kind of tick box exercise.”

So, to create something ‘different’ to deliver its core messages in a more engaging, accessible way and impactful way, BlueScope partnered with a company called Thinka. The result was a highly interactive and immersive, but still mandatory, video-based learning experience that effectively captures the attention of employees.

INTERACTIVE, RELATABLE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Comprising three short ‘day in the life of’ style videos, the content is extremely relatable based on real, aggregated and anonymised BlueScope stories. It was filmed at BlueScope locations and used employees as extras – because “we didn’t want to have any of our people as the bullies or harassers or victims,” Laura explains.

One is about bullying. Another is about sexual harassment, but rather than being based on what people know as overt sexual harassment, it is more about working in a hostile working environment showing the impact that the combination of everyday microaggressions have on female employees. “It’s a whole lot of experiences every day that create the sum total of her experience.” The third is about discrimination, again not overt, about a well-meaning paternal figure who believes genuinely that he’s “helping” younger employees by dispensing ‘advice’.

REAL-WORLD CONTEXT AND SELF-RESOLUTION

Each video includes frequent pauses for engagement, prompting employees to reflect on the scenarios and their own behaviour. Learning is reinforced with text that highlights what was occurring in each instance and links through to externally validated information like the Respect@Work report, legislation and current Australian research and health stats, so it is really contextualised.

Facilitated discussion alongside the videos when viewed as part of a team also helps ensure people understand what employees can do if they find themselves in similar situations and think about how they could do things differently.

“The power of them is that when people watch, they can really see themselves in the characters. At the same time, we also made it deliberate that the end of all of these stories is a Hollywood ending... you know the issues get resolved by the people and for the people, not by HR or someone else coming in to fix it all up. It’s about someone having that light bulb moment or someone having the ability to call them out on it and correcting their own behaviour.”



A SHIFT IN MINDSET: TREAT OTHERS AS THEY WANT TO BE TREATED

The program also encourages employees to move away from the outdated idea of treating others as you want to be treated. “It’s about realising that we need to be open-minded. Many of our workers grew up in an era where it was common to ‘treat people as you want to be treated’. That’s a fallacy. Everyone’s lived experience is completely different. So, it encourages everyone to think about treating others as they would like to be treated.”

ON-DEMAND ACCESS AND FLEXIBILITY

The eLearning modules are available on the company’s FutureScope platform meaning that anyone can access it, anytime and anywhere.

They can be viewed individually and are assigned to each employee so that there is a record of completion on their training records. However, being mindful that many workers are unwired, they are also intended to be used to stimulate a facilitated discussion by a supervisor in a toolbox or crew meeting.

Being mindful that many people say, “but what about my supervisor he/she does “this or doesn’t do that”, BlueScope also created a supporting application session called Leading Respectful Behaviours, as a companion piece for supervisors and leaders to undertake approximately three months after the baseline learning.

This practical activity-based session is designed to be co-facilitated by HR and encourages reflection and sharing on microaggressions and restorative practices. Supported by an accompanying train the trainer video, facilitator guides and materials, down to ‘how to set up the room’, these can be used on demand at any time it is convenient for the businesses to pull small groups of leaders together.

The Results So Far

VIRAL IMPACT

The response to the eLearning videos has exceeded expectations. “We nearly broke the servers with this training, it went viral, which we didn’t expect. Normally, you really have to push for engagement,” Laura shares.

In fact, half of BlueScope’s Australian business completed the first module within three weeks of the phase one launch.

Additionally, participants have frequently reached out to share how deeply they connected with the characters and scenarios in the videos.

Feedback from employees included:

“The respectful behaviour training is hands down the most effective and powerful behaviour training I have seen in my 33 years at BlueScope. The feedback from my team has sparked group discussion and introspection.”

“I am not embarrassed to say that I shed a tear at least three times during this newly transformed training program. My hats off to the team behind its creation! You will have all received this new training module in your iPoint inbox or through your training modules by now. I encourage you all to take time and space to complete for yourself and with your teams. I feel a much deeper level of connection to the topics raised and heightened awareness.”

CULTURAL SHIFT, ONE INTERACTION AT A TIME

Though still in its early stages, the program has garnered consistently positive feedback. BlueScope’s proactive approach is fostering a culture where employees feel empowered to intervene and challenge behaviours before they escalate.

Laura highlights the importance of early intervention: “It’s key to a positive workplace culture where people can ask: ‘Did you think about how that comment was received?’ This gives us more time to address predatory behavior and support those who are simply socially misguided.”

Laura flagged that there has been a significant commitment to improving communication and respect within the organisation. These included areas such as active listening, maintaining professionalism in

disagreements and being mindful of the impact of words, with over 10% of all employees committing to “think about how my words might be received before commenting” and to “genuinely listen to people’s ideas and take them on board”.

BlueScope plans to expand the program in the coming years to reflect any themes being identified by internal grievances. For example, the team has already seen the need to consider a module which looks at contractor/truck driver interactions, another for regional sites and one shows the difference between reasonable management action and bullying.

BUSINESS IMPACT

Since its introduction, BlueScope’s Respect is How We Work program has had a significant impact. It has helped the company set up a framework to take a structured, whole-of-organisation approach towards a positive duty, resulting in the creation of:

1. New policy/guidelines
2. Protocols for internal grievances
3. Education for all employees, leaders and teams
4. Support for the HR generalist population undertaking Trauma Informed Investigation training
5. Alternative reporting mechanisms for employees. This will include the introduction of a peer support model in 2025 off the back of a trial in one of BlueScope’s operational businesses
6. Quarterly grievances analysis and reporting.

In fact, an increase in reported grievances was set right from the start to be a key indicator of success. It was seen as a measure that would show an increase in employee psychological safety in terms of them having the courage to voice concerns about disrespectful behaviour and alignment with the initiative's goals. While initially there was a 200% increase in reporting, the impact of the program has meant this is now dropping down as expected to more 'normal' levels.

Additionally, to manage the increase in internal complaints, the team hired an additional ER specialist, which has reduced the need for costly external investigations. Given that each external investigation typically costs over \$20,000, handling cases in-house has resulted in significant savings – particularly when scaled across dozens of cases.

It has also improved outcomes for those involved as context is always important in these matters, which external investigators typically don’t have. Laura shares, “We tend now to only use external investigators for really complex cases, or where we have repeat ‘offenders’.”

FINAL THOUGHTS

● **KEY LEARNING**

Lessons learned from implementing inclusive programs in one area can be applied to other diversity categories, creating a broader impact across the organisation.

The key message from the team is “you don’t ever finish this work, you have to ‘maintain the rage’ and keep respect and respectful behaviours front of mind. So, we’re always planning ahead for the next internal communication campaign, the next opportunity to seek and analyse feedback like in our annual Pulse Survey, or through focus groups, or consultation around psychosocial risk.”

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We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Nations people of Australia and the traditional custodians of the lands where we live, learn, work and connect.

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