



**Leading Women podcast
Commonwealth Bank Women in Focus**

Episode 2: Di Mantell, CEO of Celsus, the Royal Adelaide Hospital

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Interviewee: Di Mantell**

Featuring: Julienne Price, Executive Manager Women in Focus

Di Mantell, CEO of Celsus, the Royal Adelaide Hospital on blazing the trails from leadership to building sustainable social infrastructure and dissolving the hierarchy from the very top. Di talks about how she champions diversity, challenges the norms of what leadership should look like and celebrates every win of her team along the way.

Julienne [00:00:02] Welcome to Leading Women, your place to share and celebrate real stories and access the tools and resources to help activate your leadership. Hi, I'm Julienne Price, Executive Manager of CommBank's Women in Focus and Leading Women is just one of the ways we support women at all stages of their business journey. So no matter where you are on your journey, we're here. Enjoy this episode as we redefine the business landscape together.

Shivani [00:00:34] Welcome to Leading Women, the place to ignite your leadership and redefine the business landscape. I'm your host, Shivani Gopal, and today's episode, we chat with a humble change maker, who never says never. Di Mantell is the CEO at Celsus Royal Adelaide Hospital, who has blazed the trails from leadership to building sustainable social infrastructure and dissolving the hierarchy from the very top. With her inclusive leadership style, Di champions diversity, challenges the norms of what leadership should look like and a personal favourite, she celebrates every win of her team along the way. Di, welcome to the Leading Women podcast. Tell me, where are you joining us from today?

Di [00:01:22] Thank you so much, Shivani, for having me on. I'm joining you from Kurna Country, which is Adelaide in South Australia.

Shivani [00:01:29] It's a beautiful part of the country and I'm joining you from the Gadigal land of the Eora Nation. Di, I want to dive straight into that incredible leadership journey of yours because yours is truly unique. You've had so many different roles and some have come from, well, some would say, non-traditional leadership backgrounds. I'd love to get that overview of your leadership journey to now.

Di [00:01:54] Thank you for that. I don't see it as unique or odd, but I think it's certainly not the normal path that many people take. I originally trained as a registered nurse in Wagga and Albury in New South Wales. I then went off and took on leadership roles in nursing, which in itself is not unusual. But I went to Tumut in the Snowy Mountains, which in the first year I was there it was -7 degrees. So that presented some of its own challenges for me as a new health service manager. I then decided that I wanted to go somewhere slightly warmer, so I took on the executive director of nursing role in Kalgoorlie in the Goldfields, which is 600 kilometres out from Perth, and provides a massive opportunity to really understand regional and remote health. I then was seconded from there to undertake a very unique opportunity to represent 22 regional health services and negotiated the nurses wage case that was the first time we had had regional representation on nurses' wages. Following that, the introduction and the roll out of that, I then got the opportunity to participate on the Fiona Stanley Hospital. The Fiona Stanley Hospital is a greenfield site in WA and it was to be a brand new 783-bed quaternary hospital in Western Australia. And I had the responsibility of looking at all the non-clinical services; some would say often the less sexy services to look at when you're trying to build a hospital. I did that for six years and had an amazing opportunity and worked with some incredible people and got to really work with architects and designers about what you can do to really build a hospital of your dreams if you get the opportunity to do it from scratch. And from there I got headhunted to go to South Australia and work for the private sector on the new Royal Adelaide Hospital. Again, another

quaternary tertiary hospital that was 800 beds, which was the first new hospital for the Royal Adelaide for a 150 years. So it was a very interesting journey and I'm now the CEO of the Public Private Partnership Section for a company called Celsus that is the private partner in the Royal Adelaide.

Shivani [00:04:09] Goodness me, what a leadership journey that is and I love that you said, you know, some of the non-sexy stuff because some of the non-sexy stuff is the interesting stuff and you've really taken cause to the things that talk about leadership and teams, especially you heading up that nurses wage case, which I think talks a lot to your leadership style, Di, which is more so about your team than it is you. And that's one of the greatest takeaways that I got in our previous conversations together. You know, so many people talk about the fact that you are only as strong as your team. You really apply it. Tell us more about that.

Di [00:04:48] Yes, I think when I first took on being the nurse unit manager for intensive care back in Wagga, if you don't have a strong team around you, then you're just not going to achieve your goals. And it is really the collective that delivers the outcomes. And in that instance, it was about getting good outcomes for patients, but it's also getting good outcomes for teams. If you respect the people that you work with and you celebrate the wins that you have, then you continue to build strength in your team. You need to recognise the diversity in the skills that you've got. You will never have all the skills that you need to do the job and you should therefore draw on the people around you. But it's also recognising what they do. It's great to be the leader and clearly when it all goes to custard, you know, the buck stops with me. I get that. But you should be able to reflect that it is the individuals that make you the person that you are and also the team. Diversity and inclusion is really important. It's really important to consider how you get people to come to the table and collectively work together when they've got very different backgrounds. But it's those opportunities to do those things as a team and then celebrate the wins that you get whether it's one of your team members won the football in a final at the weekend or, you know, someone, one of my team was a volunteer of the year in their cricket organisation. It's whatever it is, it's those things that make teams better and stronger. And that's what makes me, I think, a better leader, having great people to work with.

Shivani [00:06:19] I love that and it also seems one of the things that you've done around that is you've dissolved the hierarchy from the top in order to bring together this diverse and inclusive team that we all talk about but really struggle to achieve.

Di [00:06:34] Yes, I think you've got to take the mindset that as a leader, the best leaders are people, who can step aside and the team keeps going whether you are there or not. It should be, there is no one that's indispensable. Over time, you should be able to build all the skills up and the confidence in the people that you work with and they should be able to have their moment to shine in the team. And if they then develop their skills and go off to do something else, then I feel that I've done a really good job that those people have now got the confidence to go on and do other things. There's clearly roles that sit with me and as the CEO of an organisation, clearly I've got things that I'm accountable for and definitely sit with me. But I would take every opportunity I can to give other people the opportunity to shine and step forward.

Shivani [00:07:22] And there's so much focus on that, you know, giving other people the opportunity to shine and step forward and giving other people confidence and Di, you've had a phenomenal career, but I know from the conversations that you and I have had previously that you haven't always felt so confident. And there have been times in your life that you've had that really elusive feeling of, you know what, I'm just not quite feeling good enough. What have you done to really abolish that feeling, kick it to the curb and be the leader that you are?

Di [00:07:50] I think the first time I really, really felt it was when I was given the responsibility, I was asked to be the nurse unit manager in charge of an intensive care coronary care unit. I was very young, I was 23. It was a regional centre, which sounds like it will be a low-key facility. It was a really busy site. We had five different highways around this facility, so we got a lot of trauma, but I didn't apply for the job, other people in the unit did. I was asked to take on the role and then when I found out I was given the role, I said I'd do it for six weeks. I ended up doing it for nine years. I'm not very good at stopping, I think, but having some of the people, who did apply for that role working in the unit, I had to work out a way to actually make that work. So I sat down with them and I said, I understand, other people applied for the role. You didn't get it. You have to decide whether you're happy to work with me or whether you want to go and do something else. I'm very pleased to say that they all stayed. We found a way to work and we moved forward. But I think you've really

got to be prepared to back yourself. You've got to decide that you've got an opportunity. Somebody else may see something in you that you don't see, and you can therefore decide to go with that and apply it. And, you know, it's like the duck. You know, you look fairly calm on the top and you are paddling like crazy underneath. But I think if you don't back yourself and other people are, then you are just not going to get there. So you need to work out what those opportunities are. You need to decide if you need to invest in yourself more. I decided when I got the job that I was promoted because I was good clinically. I now had a management role. I needed to get on and go and get the skills to make sure I could back myself up on that. Nursing is very good at promoting people for the clinical skills that you've got, but not necessarily making sure you've got the actual academic skills to go with it. So I put myself through university for five years and did a Bachelor of Health Science Management. When I first enrolled my twins were three. I don't know what I was thinking. I got through it. I graduated. And then I found that I had a lot more skills than I had, so I was much more confident to do what I needed to do. I'm not the first person to do it. I won't be the last person to do it. But if you really have an opportunity to do it, you need to get yourself those skills so that you can personally feel more confident in what you're doing. And then you can stand up for yourself and your team and be confident in the role that you've got.

Shivani [00:10:22] And you're quite good at doing that, Di, actually reaching out and getting the skills that you need in order to get to that next place. And you're quite good at saying, you know what, maybe I don't have all of the skills and maybe I need to outsource and have other people enact some skills for me, because you are quite popular for putting instructions like, you know, I'm going to bring on a good CFO or I'm going to bring on a really good administrator to build out this team of leadership that is me. How do you do that?

Di [00:10:52] I think it's really important to recognise what your core skills are and then recognise what you're not really good at or what you or what it's not best for you to invest your time in. So for me it's really important for our organisation both here and previously, to have a really good CFO. It's good to have the numbers. I know how to read a budget. I know how to read financial statements. Do I want to sit down and do them all? No, I do not. And for me it is best if I am able to get in those skills and then that brings more diversity and skill into the team. I've also got a General Counsel that we've got, who again is excellent at getting all the detail and being right down into the contracts to the minute detail. So for me, having people that I can bounce ideas off, having people that I am confident with that have got strong skills that just makes us a better team and I think it makes me a better leader. Having me having access to other people as well, so that it's not just about me saying it's all about me. Anybody who thinks that is doing it wrong; I'm not a dictator. I don't support dictatorships. I'm prepared to make decisions when I have to make them. But if you can get a range of skill sets in and you've got a diversity of ranges of ages and cultural mix and male and female, then I think you're a better team. We're a team of ten. I've got a split mix of male and female. I've got five different nationalities in my team. My team ranges in age group, that's what makes us a good team.

Shivani [00:12:28] So our audiences couldn't see this. But of course, Di, you could, I was rejoicing so much in your answers that I was high fiving up into the sky and saying, hear, hear, and giving you thumbs up and saying, I've got you, sister. And I felt that so deeply because when I was listening to you, you know, how do I abolish my, you know, imposter syndrome? I loved this concept of I can stack out my leadership team. I can have a General Counsel for me in order to inform my own leadership because I don't need to be and do it all. I simply need to know who and where to outsource. Incredibly powerful stuff, Di, thank you for sharing that. Di, if there is anything that I can reflect on in our conversations today and of course, in that wonderful time that we spent together previously. You were so outwardly focused on your team and your people and we also know and we can hear your incredible humility. Yet it's so important that leaders stand up and take ownership for their incredible achievements. And Di, you have been the recipient of many awards. Of course you were their state finalist at the Telstra Women in Business Awards. Why do you think it's so important that women are visible for their achievements in leadership?

Di [00:13:41] I think people around us, who want to become leaders and managers over time, I think if they can't see somebody doing what they would like to do, then they've got no role models to base it on. I think I'm a mother and I'm a grandmother, and I really give every opportunity for my granddaughter to think that there's anything that she cannot do. But if you can't see people out there doing those roles, then it's hard to imagine that you can do them. They think I run this big hospital in Adelaide. They don't really know what that looks like. They've been in it and I think it's amazing. But I think for all people to know that, you know, those barriers aren't really there. If you really are determined, you can seek out opportunities to do those things. I

mean, I still find it mind blowing that I'm, you know, there's only 4% of CEOs who are female. I mean that still makes no sense to me whatsoever. And I never, ever have played the gender card. I think you either are good enough to do the role or you're not. And people should be selected on their skill base. I'm very proud to be a CEO of this organisation. It is very unique and slightly quirky and lots of people don't understand what PPP is, but I'm really proud of it. But I think it's important for us to talk about what we've done to be able to celebrate the achievements that we've had within the organisation itself, and also for people to understand that those roles really are out there for people in health. If you stay in the straight health stream as you go up through senior leadership, there are less and less females in those roles, which is amazing when the majority of people who start in health are female. So for me, I think it's just important that people know those roles are out there and that people have considerable skill sets that can undertake and fulfill them.

Shivani [00:15:34] And to fulfill them just, as you said, Di, we need those role models and we need to redefine what those role models look like. I want to move on to another great passion of yours and something that I know that you do so incredibly well, and that is around impact and sustainability. In terms of your leadership footprint, you've got so much to do when it comes to building infrastructure and one of the things that you want to be known for is making sure that that infrastructure is sustainable. How did that come about?

Di [00:16:03] So we have an amazing building here in Adelaide called the Royal Adelaide Hospital which takes up three city blocks. So it's very hard to miss on the landscape generally. If you fly in, you fly over it, if you drive up town, you drive past it. It's a building that has been constructed and been rated four stars, green stars from the Green Building Council of Australia, quite a mouthful. But what it's enabled us to do is have a really good base footprint of green and sustainability. What was important was we decided to do a full refinance last year and there is now a category of financing out there called Green and Sustainable Loans. We were the first to consider to go for a green and social loan. The social loan principles were only put in place in April last year. Green criteria had been around a little bit longer, but there had been no one that had really done a green and social loan. So what it required was for us to look at what we wanted to do and what we required was to have a green and social loan framework. The good part about being first is you get to be first, and that's all very exciting and it's always good to be on that side of the cheer squad. However, it meant no one had done a green social framework before, so we had to build that. We had to construct it. We had a number of advisors that we worked with, but it basically came down to our team needing to sit down and construct a framework. And what that did was it enabled us to draw on all of the really good and positive things that we have in our building, both all of the green assets that we've got, that we have used the right products to do it, that we use a lot of, all our patients got single rooms. They've all got an external outlook from the building. There's 70+ courtyards within the building. We sit in 1.6 hectares of green landscaped gardens, and then we had to draw on this social aspect, which is that we are a building that is established here as a quaternary teaching facility that provides health care for anybody who walks through the door. So we cater for all nationalities. We cater for people from adolescence up. It's not discriminated on for anyone who gets to use the building. So we provide quite a massive piece of social infrastructure. And what that's enabled us to do is to call out all of the types of statewide services we run and all the facilities that fit into that to develop up what is a true green and social loan framework. And what it enabled us to do was to go to the market and then attract a range of investors that support us in our journey to be the best we can be. And what was important was whilst we were the largest green and social loan globally at \$2.2 billion, it was a platform for us to start our journey in sustainability. So it enabled us somewhere to go, as I said, it's great to be first, but what was more important was that we need to invest on an ongoing basis now to continue to improve our building and make it as sustainable and green as it possibly can be.

Shivani [00:19:12] I can't agree more with the fact around it's great to be first. It is, right, you get all the kudos for it, but it's also so hard to be the first because you've got to really break down these barriers and these biases and sustainability is a really big thing now. But it wasn't so much so when you were going about this massive path change of getting this social change, getting these green loans, and then getting investors to actually back you. Of course, Di, this podcast is all about leading women and we know that women every day in their leadership careers are thinking about how to get backing and how to get buy in on something that is really important to them. But maybe their leaders just haven't cottoned on just yet. What lessons have you learnt through that experience of getting a buy in for sustainability that women can then translate into their career challenges right now?

Di [00:20:03] I think you really need to look at what you've got. I think when you work on a facility or a project for a long time, you just forget about how important things are. So you really don't consider all of the aspects that were considered when your building was started or your project was started. So I think it's going back and looking at what the core values of the organisation were. And I think when I went back in and I sat here late at night, writing a social framework and bringing together all those things, you have to own it. I mean we had advisors that were very helpful on this, but we had to write it. So my senior team and I sat down, we got together, we drew out all of the factors, we put everything together because you've got to be accurate in what you're portraying and if you want people to invest, you have to have a really clear message. It has to be really specific and it has to be something that people will understand. There is no point using a whole lot of gobbledygook or expressions or abbreviations. It has to be believable so that when you go to the market, people go, wow, I get it, I understand it, I believe in it, and I want to invest in it.

Shivani [00:21:11] I love it and I love that you use the word invest because we can get so many people to invest in us, in our careers, in our ideas, in our projects, or a massive sustainability project. And from what I heard, it's about knowing your audience and being super specific and making sure that they can relate to you, which is exactly what you've done and one of the many secret sauces by the sounds of things, Di, of your success. Di, there's so much more that I want to ask you. But one of the things that I have to drill down on is your leadership toolkit. I know that you use so much to infuse your leadership journey today. What has ignited your leadership that you think you might drop into our leadership toolbox for our listeners?

Di [00:21:54] I think there are two things that I think are really important. I think the first is, as I mentioned before, you have to invest in you. You can't keep doing these roles and hanging onto what you've done before. So you need to keep yourself fresh and you need to go out and invest. And whether that is talking to people or studying or whatever, but give yourself back. It might be that you need to commit to going and playing golf once a week or whatever it is. You need to look after you and invest in you so that you can give back to other people. I think that's really important. My family who live in Perth might think that that probably doesn't happen as much when I'm here working without them, but it's still important. I think the other thing that I have discovered in the last couple of years that is really important and has delivered me a lot more joy than I thought it would is mentoring. It's a really quietly quirky thing to do, and it's not something that's for everyone. But I found that if you offer yourself as a mentor and there are lots of opportunities to do it. There's a great new group out called Mentor Walks that's a national and now international group where you can go and walk and mentor at the same time. I think being able to go and give mentoring and give back to people, you don't realise how much people just want to have a chat about what your experience is and then for people to learn from it. But the other thing is I think you learn and get as much back from the mentees as they get from a mentor. And for me, being able to give back in that way has been something that I really enjoyed doing and I would really encourage other people to do.

Shivani [00:23:36] Got goosebumps there and especially because we looped back to that term of investing in you. And it's not just getting other people to invest in you. It is also your responsibility to invest in yourself. And from what I hear, it's all about having a lifelong journey with learning as you keep reaching out to do.

Di [00:23:53] Yes, it's ongoing and it's every opportunity that you get to speak to someone who's different or just listen to somebody from a different perspective, noting that you will always learn more when you listen than if you talk. I think there are real opportunities for people to really continue to grow in what you're doing. And I think when you're continuing to grow and give your own team the opportunities to do that, that's when you continue to work in a really vibrant team where people want to come to work and they want to come back into the office and be part of that. So I think you shouldn't underestimate how important that is.

Shivani [00:24:29] And you said, grow and it'll be remiss of me not to ask, Di, you've had a phenomenal leadership career and we've talked all about your journey, what is next for you?

Di [00:24:39] I don't know. I don't know. I feel like I've still got so much to do here. Each year has been so different. When I first came, we were a construction site and then we were converting from a construction site to an operating hospital. I've now been able to, with my team, get this to a really well functioning hospital that has been operational for four and a half years. So we will be five years operational live in September. We've now got the refinance in; our responsibility now is to really roll out that green and social loan financing and the reporting. And we now have got the opportunity to start profiling what this hospital does for people.

And I think the other thing that probably continues to be important is building the relationship with our public partners in this public private partnership. We started on probably a bit of a rocky base.

Shivani [00:25:31] Tell me, how do you see role modeling of female leadership for the future?

Di [00:25:37] I think there are a lot of organisations out there doing good things. You know, Chief Executive Women is one where, you know, people are profiled. I think there is definitely a big move in large organisations to really have much more diversity and inclusion as part of their base policies, which I think is really good. But I think role models can be at all sorts of different levels. I think, you know, not everybody wants to be CEO of an organisation. I mean, working crazy hours and doing crazy things to keep a lot of people happy isn't everyone's cup of tea. But if you want to be, you know, a leader in a non-government organisation or you just want to have a role where you can be the president of your association outside of work, whatever those things are, I think it's important that people are seen in the media. They are seen in all of the normal mix of organisations in the community and in business so that people can identify with somebody that that aligns with them. Everybody's looking for something different. You know, some people want to work part time. Some people don't care what they work. We've just got to have that diversity out there that people can identify and therefore they feel comfortable to step forward.

Shivani [00:26:51] So true, we've got to identify with each other, right and normalise leadership by looking at someone else. I'm looking across the camera, of course, to you, Di and you've got the most incredible pink earrings on and a little bit of pink spunk in your hair, which I just love. And growing up, I want to be able to normalise that. I want to be able to look at you and say, hey, she's a woman who completely owns who she is and she is still a leader. She doesn't need to model what male leadership looks like in order to be successful. Or perhaps you can be a brown woman like myself, yet leadership belongs to all of us. And I think there are some incredible, resounding lessons from everything that you've just shared with us. Di Mantell, thank you so much for joining the Leading Women podcast today.

Di [00:27:34] Thank you so much for the opportunity.

Julienne [00:27:37] Thanks for listening to Leading Women, where we can all activate and redefine the business landscape. So now it's over to you, access the links, tips and tools discussed in this episode at womeninfoocus.com.au and subscribe to Leading Women so you don't miss an episode. Leave a review, spread the word and let's commit to keeping the conversation going at [#leadingwomenaus](https://twitter.com/leadingwomenaus).