



## Masterpet

*From speedboat to ocean liner: Masterpet finds smooth sailing on leadership's maiden voyage*

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### Overview

#### The need

Drive necessary corporate changes through employee feedback and leadership to deliver efficient and optimum business expansion opportunities.

#### The solution

Used employee feedback from IBM Kenexa Survey Advantage on Cloud to identify and strengthen leadership within the company, and improve overall employee engagement

#### The benefit

Managers now have the ability to lead their geographically dispersed teams, remaining connected and involved.

Programs help leaders transition to the next career level and provide support network of peers.

Programs have positive impact on employee engagement scores, with the latest survey showing more than 50 percent of staff feeling fully engaged.

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Masterpet has been in business for nearly a half century providing the education, products and services people need to do what's right for their pets. Masterpet believes life is better with a pet, and the company provides the resources needed for people to take proper care of their pets. Based in New Zealand, Masterpet also has operations in Australia and employs more than 230 people. It was acquired at the end of 2011 by healthcare distributor Ebos Group. Website: [www.masterpet.com](http://www.masterpet.com)

Masterpet is a New Zealand success story and a well-recognized name in pet food and supplies. With roots going back to 1954, Masterpet's mantra is: "Life's better with a pet, and we've never met a pet we didn't get." The company has rapidly evolved from a small, family-owned business into a much larger, trans-Tasman business through local expansion and acquisition in Australia, and now forms part of the EBOS Group – one of the largest suppliers of international healthcare brands in the Australasian region.

The team at Masterpet uses a nautical analogy of a speedboat and an ocean liner to make sense of the changes in business during the past decade. The historically family-operated business is likened to a speedboat – easily maneuverable and quick in shallow waters with a captain in charge. However, it does not possess the scale and robustness needed to travel far. The new corporate, Chief Executive Officer (CEO)-led business is like an ocean liner – it can navigate the deep and sometimes rough seas with more crew on deck. However, it can be cumbersome to turn and adjust.

Like many organizations that have experienced similar changes and growth, Masterpet must perform a balancing act, both in terms of business strategies and processes, and managing its workforce.



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Solution components:

- IBM® Kenexa® Survey Advantage on Cloud
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### **The challenge: driving change through leadership**

Masterpet aims to maintain the speedboat-like agility, rich cultural history and family-driven values that made the business a success in the first place, while driving the necessary corporate changes, including people practices, to deliver efficient and optimum business expansion opportunities.

Sean Duggan, Chief Executive Officer of Masterpet, sees this balancing act as a leadership challenge and priority. “Though employees may still have an expectation of me to be the leading figure in the business, I cannot lead the business alone,” Duggan says.

As Masterpet grew it became clear that managing the change process was a leadership issue that needed to be dealt with at each level of the organization. At Masterpet, the focus was not only on delegating the responsibility and accountability for managing the change, but equipping managers, who are often promoted based on technical expertise, with the skills required to become effective people leaders.

### **The solution: effectively identifying and strengthening leaders**

Beyond identifying engagement levels within an organization, an employee survey from Kenexa, an IBM Company, enables organizations to analyze results through a number of different lenses, such as team and position level feedback. It is possible to explore areas such as manager effectiveness by extracting items in the survey that managers have responsibility for. Looking at the data in this way can increase the individual’s awareness of how their management performance is viewed.

Fiona Couchman, Learning and Development Manager at Masterpet, has been instrumental in utilizing the feedback from Kenexa surveys, for the past five years, as input for the development of the company’s leadership program. “We looked at the areas of concern expressed by our people, specifically around leadership, and realized it was not a one-size-fits-all approach to developing the leadership program,” Couchman says.

“Learning modules and outcomes were customized and tiered at three levels (supervisor/team leader, manager and executive) using a mixture of in-house expertise and external providers. Couchman supports the notion that “leadership development is also not a one-hit wonder. It needs to be progressive, practiced and sustainable.”

## **The results: better leadership, higher engagement**

As a result of Couchman's vision, Masterpet's leadership training program runs multiple years – and the first group is already well into their programs. Now, each employee in the organization who is responsible for leading people is on some form of a two-year leadership tract. Classes are spread out to help ensure there is enough time, in between, for the information to “sink in,” and for the new tools and behaviors to be practiced.

The program tackles topics relevant to issues that managers face in their roles. For the executive team, the program is more closely focused on identifying, retaining and engaging high performing employees, and growing personally as leaders. In terms of change management, the program is focused on aspects such as communicating a clear strategy and instilling confidence in the organization's future. Team leaders and supervisors can earn a recognized qualification from a tailored program at Wellington Institution of Technology. The program's key focus areas include keeping staff motivated through times of change while also developing the courage to have difficult conversations at work, actively listening, communicating clearly and valuing input from others.

Masterpet managers rave about the program.

Jenny Dickinson, Procurement Manager for Australasia, says the program enables her to lead her geographically dispersed team and remain connected and involved despite the distance. One thing Dickinson learned is not to react too quickly to try and solve her team's problems, but rather allow them to first “have a vent” and then encourage them to seek their own solutions.

A Pick-Pack team leader says her program has helped her in the transition from being a long-standing team member to a supervisor and how to manage new relationships at work. In addition to attaining critical skills, program participants also identify the benefit of the program as providing “a support network of peers with whom you can share your concerns, difficulties and bounce ideas off.”

And it has not stopped there.

Having experienced the positive effect of developed leaders, Masterpet decided to roll out an optional leadership program for its key clients such as vet practitioners and pet store operators. During the last six years, Masterpet has trained more than 360 customers through a 12-month Masterpet Leadership program. They feel cascading strengths and developing those in its business network is mutually beneficial and builds business relationships that go beyond supply and demand.

The success of the programs is reflected in Masterpet's consistently high "confidence in leadership" scores in the Kenexa NZ survey for the past two years. The programs also had a positive impact on its engagement scores, with the latest survey showing more than 50 percent of staff feeling fully engaged. Couchman recalls the theme of her first company conference six years ago, "Family Values, Corporate Focus." Now, that theme is actively delivered on, thanks to leadership development throughout the organization.

The business has gone from strength to strength, and with the depth of leadership development building across the business, Masterpet is well set to continue to deliver on expectations – of the owners, customers and its people.

### **About Kenexa, an IBM Company**

To us, business has always been personal – and it has always been about helping to make the workforce smarter, which is why we are proud to be a platform for a Smarter Workforce. We look at it from two angles – empowering people and transforming business. Our tools help enable businesses to attract and keep the best people, develop their skills, cultivate new leaders and capitalize on their collective intelligence by applying human insights, social tools and workforce analytics to transform the way they work. We provide deep insight and experience in employee engagement, talent management and leadership development mixed with industry-leading technology and social platforms, giving us the unique ability to build a Smarter Workforce.

### **For more information**

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Route 100  
Somers, NY 10589

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