

## 2020 Exchange | Chair Biography

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### Peter Stirling Benson

*"I believe great leadership emanates from the four 'E's. Personal energy, an ability to energise others, applying an edge to all decision-making and championing the importance of superb execution."*



During an international management career spanning 40 years Peter has worked in a range of industries, including international shipping, drinks, airlines, television, live entertainment and fitness.

After studying liberal arts at University College London he was recruited by a major shipping company as a management trainee and posted to New York. As a regional sales manager he was part of an expatriate team launching a fleet of leading edge and highly flexible roll on - roll off cargo ships servicing destinations around the world.

After this formative period he returned to the UK to complete his MBA at the London Business School, before joining the brewing division of Diageo, working in senior strategic and operational roles. Upon immigrating to Sydney, Peter spent four years at British Airways as the regional head of business, distribution and marketing services for Australia and New Zealand.

At this juncture Peter had gained a formal business education together with broad international management experience, accumulated in highly demanding roles, across a variety of industries. This equipped him to commence a CEO career, with a personal interest in organisations undergoing change and transition. He cut his teeth as a CEO launching TV1, a general entertainment channel distributed on Foxtel and Austar. With a key objective to acquire the best content, TV1 rapidly became the leading channel in its category.

Following this success he was recruited by Galileo, the market leader in electronic services to 2,600 travel agents across Australia and New Zealand. The mandate from investors was to overhaul the business in advance of a trade sale. This he achieved in two years, also tendering for and winning a global agreement with anchor client Flight Centre.

Peter's leadership success at Galileo attracted the attention of the PBL organization and he was appointed CEO to turn around the fortunes of Ticketek. He rapidly formulated an innovative business strategy, commencing with a \$10million capital investment to shift the business into the embryonic online space. This resulted in the share of on-line sales growing from 8% to 35%, a substantially improved customer experience, reduction in the cost to serve, decreased operational complexity, together with the ability to capture and store customer data. Restoring the business to sustainable profit also coincided with many achievements, including securing ticketing rights to the Rugby World Cup in 2003 and acquiring Allphones Arena in 2004.

In 2008 Peter was appointed CEO of Fitness First Australia with the challenge to transform a good company into an exceptional one. Peter was also a member of the global executive team designing an international strategy around sales, fitness, member experience, commercial management and people. The subsequent GFC and the emergence of 24/7 budget clubs meant that maintaining business performance was an achievement in itself. Peter initiated a series of local programs designed to service

the Australian market. This included the first online fitness program, the launch of loyalty and benefits programs to 340,000 members as well as the opening of seven new clubs. This increased the national network to 94 clubs nationally, serviced by 5,800 staff

Peter's CEO career over 15 years commenced at TV1 with a team of 8 staff and revenue of \$8 million and concluded at Fitness First with a team of 5,800 and revenue of \$345 million. . He has subsequently developed a 'portfolio' of business interests over the past seven years. This portfolio includes co-leading a consortium to purchase Ticketek (not consummated due to the float of their owners Nine Entertainment in 2012), interim CEO roles in education and health, investments in start-up companies, as well as facilitating, mentoring and coaching.

Board members, executive teams and staff all hold him in high regard as a tried and tested communicator, facilitator, mentor and coach.

In addition, Peter is an investor in start-ups, including Hit100 which specialises in providing nutrition and support services to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

In March 2106 Peter was appointed adjunct Professor at UTS Business School, coinciding with the launching of the MBA program for entrepreneurs (MBAe).

More recently, in 2018 he was appointed Chair of the Advisory Board to the Crinitis restaurant group

Peter's expertise lies in methodologies around:

- Challenging the status quo and embracing disruption, in domestic and international markets.
- Leading, energising and transforming businesses at different stages in their life cycles.
- Rapidly formulating clear and compelling strategies.
- Creating and leading teams to execute collaboratively and effectively.
- Influencing decisions at Board level.
- Championing business cultures that are open, dynamic and innovative.
- Overseeing and delivering improved and sustainable performance.
- Harnessing the talent and skills of people so they each fulfil their potential

## **Why 2020 Exchange**

Peter has a successful track record working in a broad range of businesses undergoing major transition and change. He believes that the future of work and the role of leadership are now under the microscope as never before. Leadership challenges include the emergence of AI and robotics, increasing regulation, greater focus on short term results and the competition for talent. Peter is keen to work as a 2020 Chair with CEO's who share his pragmatic appetite for challenging the status quo, continual learning, orientation to finding useful solutions resulting in a personal commitment to making a difference.. This is what aligns Peter with 2020 Exchange.

## **Positions Held**

2016 – Now	Adjunct Professor - UTS Business School
2013 – 2014	Management Consultant, HealthierU
2013	Interim Chief Executive, National English Accreditation Services
2011 – 2012	Interim Chief Executive, Elevate Australia
2008 – 2011	Managing Director, Fitness First Australia
2001 – 2006	Chief Executive & Director, Ticketek.com
1999 – 2001	General Manager, Galileo
1995 – 1998	Chief Executive, TV1
1994 – 1995	General Manager Marketing, James Hardie Industries
1992 – 1993	Business & Marketing Services Manager, British Airways
1989 – 1992	Business & Distribution Manager, British Airways
1987 – 1989	Business Development Manager, Diageo
1986 – 1987	Business Strategist, Diageo
1981 – 1984	Area Sales Manager, Barber Blue Sea
1980 – 1981	Management Trainee, Ocean Transport & Trading

## **Board Positions held**

2018 – Now	Chair of the Advisory Board – Crinitis restaurant group
2012 – Now	Non-Executive Director - Children's Cancer Institute
2007 – 2015	Advisor to Preceptor Recruitment
2012 – 2014	Advisor to Elevate Australasia Pty Ltd
2006 – 2008	Non-Executive Director, My Tickets
2001 – 2006	Director, Ticketek.com

## **Qualifications**

2012	Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (GAICD)
1984 - 1986	Master of Business Administration (MBA) - London Business School (LBS)
1974 - 1978	Bachelor of Arts (Combined Honours) - University College London (UCL)