



# DIVERSITY KEY TO SUCCESS

JOHN DURIE



## *Lendlease's CEO aims to be inclusive but decisive*

St Bernard's College in Essendon is better known for the footballers it has produced than chief executives but Lendlease boss Steve McCann is an exception.

One of seven children, McCann started at the school when his family moved from Adelaide in the late 1970s.

Essendon legends like Matthew Lloyd and the Madden Brothers went to the school, but while McCann played football in his youth if he was good at any sport it was basketball.

McCann will tell anyone who will listen his background is working-class Catholic, with his parents Barry and Margaret strong members of the local church and his mother's family featuring a nun and a priest.

She was busy bringing up her children but his parents "gave us a values-based upbringing, knowing the importance of honesty, integrity and authenticity".

His first job was in a city-based accounting firm but after a few years he moved across to work with Gavin Marantelli, the prominent bookmaker, "who worked nearby so he was convenient and it was also the best way I could save up to put myself through law school".

Marantelli is known as the "percentage" man and McCann's numeric skills were ideally suited to the game.

It wasn't the horses that attracted McCann but the numbers.

It seems bookmaking is a popu-

lar way to learn the trade as chief executive, with Alinta's Jeff Dimery also taking that path.

"In my day if you were academically gifted you became a lawyer or a doctor," McCann says, and he chose the law.

One of his brothers became a paediatrician, so it seems the McCann family were gifted students who benefited from the Christian Brothers schooling.

McCann fancied himself as a litigator like Harry Hamlin in the television series *LA Law* but soon realised he was more suited to commercial work and numbers.

"I wanted to get involved in deals and lawyers tended to come in when the idea was formed, so I went into investment banking," he says.

After three years at what is now Herbert Smith Freehills, McCann started banking at then top-tier firm Ord Minnett, whose star bankers at the time included the late Kerry Packer's close adviser Neville Miles. He was hired at Freehills by Peter Hay.

One of his first transactions was for a company called Lendlease and this job took him to Sydney, where he has lived since the transfer.

His banking career covered equity capital markets, and mergers and acquisitions with a property

base — working with the likes of legends such as BT's Michael Cook, Morgan Stanley boss Richard Wagner, Aquasia's Angus James and Macquarie's Tim Bishop.

If you ask McCann who and what he learned from his banking days he offers a modest response.

"I was lucky enough to be exposed to a range of different people from diverse backgrounds. When people talk about diversity I think it's more than gender. I have

tried to extract the best from the people I have worked with. You can never undervalue experience," he says.

In his 12 years as an investment banker, McCann says while some focus on the end result, he was "more relationship-driven".

One of those relationships was with Lendlease.

One person who he does single out is former Lendlease chair David Crawford who, along with then boss Greg Clarke, hired McCann at Lendlease.

"He is the closest thing I have had as a mentor. He has had such a wealth of experience and a clarity of thought that has made him a great sounding board," says McCann.

"The most difficult issues I have confronted, which are mainly people issues, I have been able to talk (through) with David, who with a calm approach has helped me get the right answer," he adds.

Asked about his leadership style, McCann says: "I try to gather as much information as I can, to get as wide a range of perspectives as I can get. I never underestimate what I don't know. Resilience is the vital ingredient. My aim is to be inclusive but decisive."

After 10 years in the top job he is obviously closer to the end than the beginning but McCann says he has no plans to step aside any time soon.

"The nature of what we do is long-term, which requires stabili-



ty, and we have been lucky to have retained high-quality senior management. I have no shortage of energy and a lot of unfinished business," he says.

McCann is deeply away of the fact he has 12,500 people working for him and he is accountable for their career paths.

The recent problems in the company's engineering division were described as "a major disappointment".

McCann has long-time banker Bruce McLennan from Gresham working on a possible sale, which is a tough ask given the division is in the middle of major projects that are notoriously difficult to value.

The big call at Lendlease was to focus on urbanisation and McCann says there are so many good things happening at the company that the trick is to get the market to focus on them and not the engineering issues, where cost overruns have caused financial problems.

"The push to urbanisation is clear and relentless and it is a critical driver of emerging infrastructure, with technology a major new focus," he adds.

Ultimately the final call on McCann's time at Lendlease will rest with new chair Michael Ullmer.

But right now McCann himself is focusing on getting the market to shift its attention to the many good things the company is doing around the world.



**McCann**