

FEB
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Karen Gately - Passionate Optimist with Unwavering Belief in the Power of the Human Spirit.

by Victor Perton

I had the exciting opportunity to ask [Karen Gately](#) some questions about Australian leadership and her optimism. What excited me? [Karen](#) is a self-described "passionate optimist with unwavering belief in the power of the human spirit."

[Karen](#) is the author of [The People Manager's Toolkit: A Practical guide to getting the best from people](#) and [The Corporate Dojo: Driving extraordinary results through spirited people](#).

VP: Karen, what's your favourite story of a boss or a leader you have had?

Karen Gately: For many years I was fortunate to work for [Jeremy Duffield](#) at Vanguard Investments. There are so many stories I could share of [Jeremy](#) being a great example of a leader who brings both his head and his heart to his role.

My favourite moment though was when I arrived at Jeremy's office to find a typically conservative and highly professional executive proudly wearing a less than conventional tie. The grin on Jeremy's face was a dead give-away that something was up. He was wearing a South Park "Respect my Authority" tie.

[Jeremy's](#) capacity to not take himself too seriously is a big part of why people enjoy working for him as much as they do. [Victor, as you and people like Janine Kirk say](#), that self-effacing humour puts people at ease and is the mark of a true Australian leader.

VP: Karen, what are the unique qualities of Australian leadership?

Karen Gately: Australian leaders are known for their relatively laid-back style and sense of humour.

Among the strengths our culture brings out in leadership is the ability to build rapport and encourage free flow honest communication.

Australian leaders are less likely to be hierarchical and more inclined to connect with members of their team at all levels of the organisation's structure.

Great Aussie leaders understand the value of a laugh and bring a lighthearted spirit to their roles when it's needed.

VP: What do Australians want of their leaders today?



Karen Gately: Most Australians want leaders to have courage and act with decency. Most people appreciate that leaders can't always make the decisions we'd prefer them to. What we want to know is that the people in charge have integrity and can be trusted to be fair and serve their organisation, team or community faithfully.

We want leaders to step up to the inherent challenges of their roles, be decisive and have the courage to do the right thing.

VP: Thinking about your life, who have been the leaders who have inspired and inspire you?

Karen Gately: During the time I worked for the Vanguard Group I was fortunate to meet many leaders who inspired me.

Founder **John Bogle** is a man who built an extraordinarily successful organisation on the foundations of trust, respect and integrity. The leaders he appointed and the successors who followed him as CEO all had the same depth of commitment to doing the right thing. I was inspired by their intelligence, compassion, honesty and work ethic.

VP: Karen, what makes you optimistic? What's the case for optimism?


Karen Gately: Most people are good and want to do the right thing. While each of us can become self-absorbed, history has shown time, and again people rise to the occasion when others are in need. With the right environment created by great leaders with courage, integrity and infectious optimism, human beings will find the solutions to our problems whether they be in business or on a global scale. We have the intelligence: I am optimistic that we can unify our efforts and thrive.

Karen Gately, founder of Corporate Dojo, is a leadership and people-management specialist. Karen works with leaders and HR teams to drive business results through the talent and energy of people. She is the author of [The People Manager's Toolkit: A Practical guide to getting the best from people \(Wiley\)](#) and [The Corporate Dojo: Driving extraordinary results through spirited people](#). For more information about Karen's books and offerings visit www.corporatedojo.com

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