Understanding your competitors is really interesting. People often say, “Who are your competitors—this other organization or that other business organization?” I don’t see it like that, see? A lot of people have moved in to our space over the years—lawyers, business services providers like Deloitte—you know, they’re all in the space and that then liberates our organization to move into some of those spaces. And so I’ve—in reinventing the concept of a business organization, we have become a business service provider; we have a consulting group that has a big budget; we have a legal firm; we have then our big membership services, which is subsidized by the consulting business and the legal firm. And we, of course, have this major lobbying representational effort which is the heart and soul of what we stand for. So, it is quite interesting to know who your competitors are.

In terms of knowing our customers, well, we’ve—we do have 10,000 members covering 60,000 businesses and for hundreds of thousands of employees. We have a structure of state councils that meet every month, which active chief executives and directors sit on those councils. They are very high-level councils. We have people come along to those who can make decisions, so I attend—to the wealth of frequent flyer points—four meetings most months around Australia: one in Adelaide, one in Brisbane, one in Sydney, one in Melbourne. And I sit around with, you know, probably 80 CEOs every month and find out what’s going on in their business, test our policy positions. And then every three months we have a national executive meeting, which is made up of a selection of a number of elected officials from each of those councils, and that is a premier business decision-making body in our organization and that’s the one that’ll finally sign off on our position on climate change or on industrial relations or taxation or whatever. So, I have a really great network.

Then, of course, our members aren’t backward in coming forward. They do tend to tell us what they think about things and we have quite a good interactive relationship with our members. We have loads of meetings all the time—38 meetings of members, four times a year, through our BizAssist briefing sessions—and they’re feedback sessions as well as information receptors. And, for example, we’ve done—we do surveys of our members through those and we get a couple of thousand to those meetings four times a year. It’s a hell of a big effort for the organization to man all those briefings, but that’s fundamentally what we do. So, we are a very connected group, and I think that is absolutely vital, to be connected to your customer, which you know, in our case, is our member.

Diversity is one of the things that I’m really committed to—diversity in decision making, diversity in the perspectives that are brought to the organization. It really confronts me that so few women are involved in decision making in major corporations, or both at the board level and so few lead them. And I think that partly is a problem with women, that we just have too much on our plate. But decision making, to have young people, old people, women, men, people from different backgrounds—socioeconomic, ethnic—involvement in
decision making, you'll make better decisions if you do it. But you have to do it, you have to make your mind up that's a priority. So you have to have an affirmative approach to it and driving that value into your customers is doing absolutely the right thing and you'll give them a huge benefit.