

Your Levy At Work



Greenlife
INDUSTRY AUSTRALIA

Your levy has funded this success story

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Developing talent to increase nursery production

At a glance

Who this is for

Emerging nursery leaders looking to advance their career through practical professional development opportunities.

Why it matters

Investment in personal and professional development is as important as investing in new technologies or systems within a nursery. Empowered and trained staff advance the performance of a nursery and boost the bottom line.

For most professions the career pathway is obvious, if you become an engineer, you study engineering. An architect studies architecture. A GP studies medicine.

Careers in the nursery industry often develop in unexpected ways – and many nursery leaders arrive through hands-on experience rather than a traditional career pathway. Retaining and developing skilled people continues to be a key focus of levy investment.

The [Nursery Emerging Leaders Program](#) (NY24004) was developed to strengthen practical leadership skills in real nursery settings.

The three-month program focuses on helping emerging leaders build confidence in communication, people management and day-to-day decision-making, particularly in environments where formal management training is often limited.

Jong's Nursery, an Adelaide wholesale nursery specialising in potted colour and orchids, the training made available through this program was a welcome investment in the productivity and future of the nursery. Their own Matte Rennerts completed the program in the inaugural cohort.



Hort Innovation NURSERY FUND

This project has been funded by Hort Innovation using the nursery research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government. For more information on the fund and strategic levy investment visit horticulture.com.au

Making the intangible, tangible

Leadership development often starts with uncomfortable self-reflection. Self-described as someone who 'gets straight to the point', a consistent bit of feedback Matte received from his team was the delivery of his message.

"Up until this course, my communication style was quite direct and unfortunately, my directness at times was taken personally by members of my team," Matte said.

"The goal I set during the first session within the program was to improve my emotional intelligence and develop empathy in my leadership style."

Part of the goal-setting process was a leadership skills assessment, where Matte was identified as a 'Driver'. Although not a surprise to Matte, the label helped put into words some of the immediate skills he brings to his nursery. These skills include goal-orientation, focus on efficiency, and decisive and direct communication.

Articulating his skillset opened Matte to critical reflection on what he wanted to achieve.

Through the program, Matte developed:

- stronger team engagement – learning how emotional awareness and communication affect culture and productivity
- more effective escalation skills – recognising when to step in directly and when to work through issues collaboratively
- active listening skills – better understanding the challenges team members were experiencing
- more strategic communication – learning when to lead with practicality and when to focus on how changes were affecting people emotionally.

In Matte's case, the benefits of that development quickly extended beyond individual skill-building, strengthening team dynamics and contributing to clearer succession pathways within the nursery.

A nursery's investment

Matte's almost 10-year tenure at Jong's Nursery has seen him naturally step into a leadership role.

"The team see my experience as valuable and often come to me with questions or looking for direction for particular tasks," Matte said.

"I was doing what any teammate would and helping them out, I hadn't realised that this was the start of me stepping up."

Nursery Owner, Peter Jong saw Matte's potential as a leader before he did and saw the benefits Matte's increased leadership could mean for the business.

"As an intelligent and ambitious person, it was always clear that Matte would require and was capable of handling a more diverse range of tasks," Peter said.

"We wanted to give Matte the tools so he can support others around him and help them reach their potential the same way he has.



“The Emerging Leaders program gave participants practical leadership and examples from within the industry, while also giving the next generation of leaders the opportunity to connect, learn from each other and continue developing professionally.”

Unlikely pathway

While Matte has carved a career for himself in the greenlife sector, his arrival has not been linear.

“We were neighbours with the nursery growing up, and my start came with a couple of after school jobs here and there,” Matte said.

“When I graduated school and tried my hand at engineering, I realised that I preferred the tactile and engaging nature of working in a nursery.

“I started small with fixing things around the nursery and it’s now become a lifelong passion of mine. As well as the Emerging Leaders program, I am studying horticulture to really cement my place in industry.

“The program was better than expected, and a whole lot more engaging and hands-on. When talking about leadership it’s hard to articulate the benefit.

“Having finished the program, I am confident that my leadership and associated skills have improved in a tangible way. It is felt in our nursery and will continue to benefit our day-to-day operations.”

Expressions of interest are open for the next cohort of Emerging Leaders, for more details reach out to Jeanette at jeanette@innovativeinfluences.com.au. The full program has been covered in our recent Nursery Paper, with more details [here](#).

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