



Christopher Shen

MAHRI

Principal consulting psychologist

CJS High Performance Consulting

Education

I graduated with a Bachelor of Science (Honours) degree in psychology from Monash University in 1994 and began a Master of Applied Psychology at Victoria University, which I had to defer because of work commitments.

I've also completed the Copland Program for emerging leaders, held by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA).

First job

When I was an undergraduate student I started working part-time as a research assistant at the school of behavioural health sciences at La Trobe University. I was really passionate about a future career in psychology and I wanted some real-life experience on top of all the academic training. The psychologist I was working with was also a sports psychologist, so I worked with him with a lot of his sport clients and it was great.

In my early career I worked as a sports psychologist in Melbourne and I moved across to HR by working for Chandler MacLeod before moving to international strategic HR firms, DDI Asia Pacific International and DBM.

Why HR?

I love HR and am really passionate about our ability to contribute and influence an organisation's productivity and performance through its most valuable asset—its people.

I got into HR after a sort of epiphany in my early career as a sports psychologist. I was working with professional sporting clubs and one night I was standing on a muddy training ground, it was pouring with rain and I thought: 'why am I here?'

I found sports psychology wasn't intellectually challenging. Professional sports teams were asking me to do the same things year after year and I was really interested in businesses and how they ran. Sports psychology at that level is very glamorous because you're travelling all over with the team, but that wears off pretty quickly and what becomes important is the work, and it simply wasn't intellectually challenging for me. One of my mentors suggested HR would satisfy my intellectual curiosity, so I looked into it.

Current duties

I've been running my own business, CJS High Performance Consulting, for more than two years. I provide consulting solutions to my clients in strategic HR, and the majority of my work is in leadership identification, assessment and development.

I hold talent identification and leadership development programs to redress and enhance areas of leadership and leadership capabilities.

I also still do some sports

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psychology work—working one-on-one with athletes and clubs—but it's pro bono because most sports, apart from AFL, can't afford this type of service.

Challenges

Personally, my main challenge is to maintain a work/life balance. I'm an aspiring actor—this year I was in the film *Macbeth*—and I'm also a member of the Australian wrestling team and am training for the Beijing Olympics in 2008. I train six days a week, for two to four hours and I get by on about five hours sleep a night.

On a wider scale, I think the HR industry in Australia faces the challenge of being relevant and helping the country's business, community and political leaders be effective in a growing and changing global environment.

Lessons

I think vocational training in the classroom will often leave you unprepared for the real world. I think many aspiring psychologists and HR professionals would do well to gain some work experience while studying, which is what I did. This is a lesson I've learned from observing others who didn't do this and found their

first experience working with clients a heady one.

Professional development

I'm really committed to attending and participating in professional development events held by AHRI, CEDA, the Australian Institute of Management and the Australian Psychological Society.

I'm also a member of CEDA's Leadership Taskforce, and a mentor for CEDA's young leaders round-tables and AIM's Emerging Professionals Group.

10-year plan

I want to continue providing world's best-practice solutions for my clients, meeting and exceeding their expectations.

I aim to become more involved as a business leader, influencing public policy in Australia, through CEDA and other public policy forums.

Personally, I want to continue living a full life—running my own business, pursuing my Olympic dreams and seeing how far I can go in acting. I'll still be running my business in 10 years' time and I want to grow it and make sure it's the embodiment of a contemporary modern business.

Christopher Shen spoke with Bridget Cull.