



THE **BREAKTHROUGH.CO**

## Case study

RTL

**Industry**  
Technical & Engineering

**Employees**  
63

# Building great leaders and great teams

RTL has been a major supplier of static traffic signs, electronic road safety and traffic management equipment in New Zealand for over 30 years.

## Summary

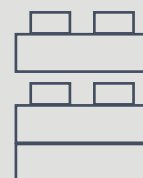
When Joanne McMahon joined the company as Sales Manager it was a very traditional, old-school company with a hierarchical management structure and poor communication between the management team.

Joanne took over the role of General Manager pre-Covid and during lockdown she realised that improving the management team's leadership and communication skills was a priority.

RTL put 12 of their senior management team through the Active Manager Programme with The Breakthrough. The participants in the programme came from inventory, production, sales, accounts, and customer service. Joanne was the Leader Coach responsible for 1:1 coaching and follow up sessions after the monthly workshops and colabs facilitated by Ange Besant.



**23**  
participants



**276**  
modules completed

**More human workplaces**

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# The challenge

Refereeing is not typically part of a General Manager's job description but it's a role Joanne was forced to play in her first 12 months on the job.

"I had to stop my team from fighting with one another," says Joanne. "They really struggled to communicate, not only with their teams, but with their peers at management level. I read some abusive emails between our managers that made me realise just how bad the situation was. The challenge was that some people were resistant to change. They had that classic 'this is the way things have always been done around here' attitude."

"My goal was to empower our managers. That might sound kind of clichéd, but I wanted them to have the strength of their own convictions. I wanted them to be able to make decisions on their own without always coming to me."



**"The course made me realise I needed to change. I needed to manage myself and do some introspective work instead of always**

**looking for someone else to blame. I realised the people I'm working with are all different and I need to treat them differently."**

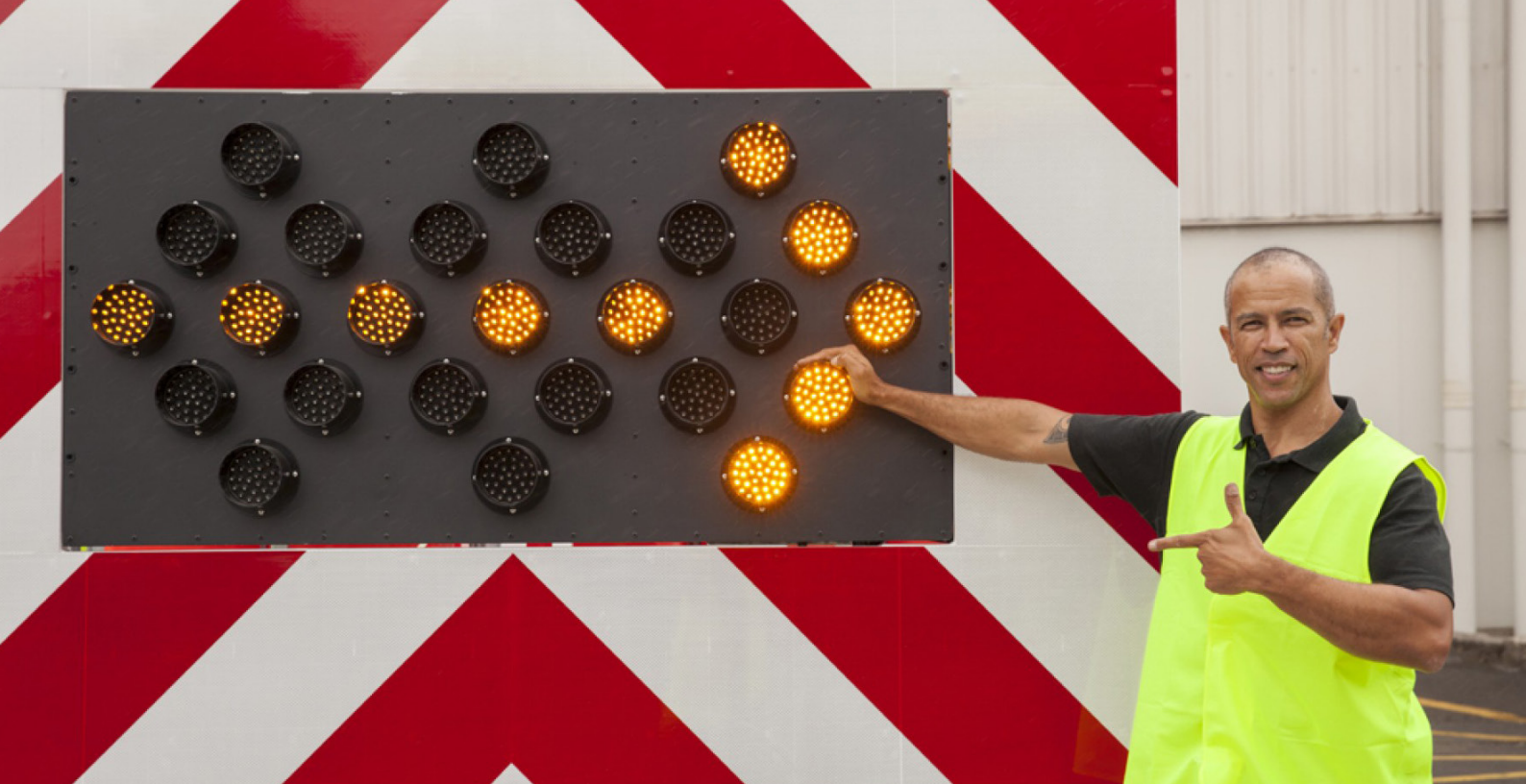
# The solution

RTL considered a number of other change management and leadership development programmes before deciding to work with The Breakthrough. Joanne had to convince the owner of the company — a Dutch accountant who is reluctant to spend money on soft skills development — that the benefits would far outweigh the cost.

"The Breakthrough's proven track record in this space was a big plus for me," says Joanne. "They had worked with a client of ours and they couldn't recommend Ryan and his team highly enough. Ryan is a very engaging, dynamic character who I felt would relate well to our team while Ange got the measure of everyone really quickly and helped our team open up to each other."

Ange Besant was the Partner Coach from The Breakthrough who facilitated the workshops and the colab sessions. Her role was to support the participants through the learning and challenge them to make sure they got the most from the programme.





## The process

RTL had done no formal management or leadership training over the previous 30 years. So, for the majority of the managers on the programme, it was a journey into the unknown.

"We threw them in at the deep end and some of them found it confronting," says Joanne. "There are a lot of strong personalities in the group and they all came into the programme with their own biases."

"I was concerned how some of them would react to the soul searching aspect of the work but after a few months I noticed a marked change in their behaviour. They all started speaking the same language and relating to each other so much better."

The objective of the programme was to build a cohesive team by helping them to understand their different personalities and management styles so they could be more supportive of each other instead of fighting their own corner.

"The concepts are simple but they help people create new habits that are so

powerful," says Ange. "The Active Manager Programme is run over 12 months so you can really see people develop and change by consistently practising the tools and techniques we work on together. You can do a 1-day workshop that you forget about the next day but a 12-month programme reflects the commitment of the company."

There's also a commitment required from the individual. The effectiveness of the programme depends on participants working on themselves outside the workshops and colabs. Joanne had monthly one-to-one meetings with each participant to keep them accountable and on track.

"The onus was on them to be ready and have done their homework," says Joanne. "Once they realised it was a priority for the company, and more importantly that the work they were doing was benefiting themselves and their relationships outside work, there was a noticeable change in their attitude."

Shane Murray is the Technical Manager at RTL and he admits to being sceptical about the programme initially.

"I've been a manager for over 15 years so I wanted to know why we were reinventing the wheel. I was told it was a team building exercise but I thought: 'You can't force people to work better together by teaching them how to be better leaders'. After the first few sessions, I changed my mind. This course made me refocus and revisit a lot of the things I've learned in the past."

"It became more about myself and it changed the way I look at people. I'm an engineer and my job is to get things working, to get things done. This course

taught me to pause, stop and ask myself if I needed to fix every problem. It taught me when and how to say 'No'."

"I also had some anger issues. I want to get things done now and when people don't respond the same way I do, it frustrates me. The course made me realise I needed to change. I needed to manage myself and do some introspective work instead of always looking for someone else to blame. I realised the people I'm working with are all different and I need to treat them differently."

## Experience rating



of RTL participants rated  
"Clear Communication" module as **"very good"**

## The results

The impact of the programme was fairly noticeable, fairly quickly, according to Joanne McMahon.

"It started with the language and tone of the reports the management team sent me," she says. "Whereas before they would have pointed the finger at others for not doing their job, now they're much more aware of their personal responsibility. One manager admitted in a report that 'I let the team down this month.' That would never

have happened before we started the programme."

Simple things like two of the sales team inviting a colleague for coffee — a colleague they would normally have had nothing to do with — also convinced Joanne that the culture of the company was changing. Where previously there were cliques within the management team, now it's a much more inclusive environment.



"We're all speaking the same language," agrees Shane. "We're all on the same page. We've done the same exercises so we understand each other much better. We talk more and are working much better together as a result."

Other benefits include:

- learning competition drove better behaviour;
- raised managers' self-awareness;
- more engaged team members;
- less friction between departments;
- better perspective on the value of processes and why they need to be followed;
- helped the team commit to Continuous Improvement.

The programme also freed up Joanne's time to focus on more strategic priorities because she doesn't have to be the referee anymore.

"I don't have to micromanage people. Now they can have difficult conversations with each other without blowing up or blowing off steam. They're much more accountable for their own decisions. People are communicating much better with one another. They're stopping to ask themselves: 'Does Joanne need to be involved in this decision or can I handle it myself?'"

"Before, if I didn't answer an email within five minutes, I'd get a phone call asking me to solve their problem. I had too much of an open door policy. Now every one of the management team is capable

of taking ownership of their issues and is more respectful of other people's time. Management team meetings are completely different and the organisation is more efficient and effective as a result."

So would you recommend the Active Manager Programme to other organisations?

"One hundred percent. We're putting a second group through the programme which is a real measure of success and a sign that the organisation is committed to investing in and supporting our people."



## Get in touch

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## About The Breakthrough Company

Since 2003, The Breakthrough Co has been running development programmes for business leaders and managers. In that time, we've learned a lot about what actually works in developing fundamental management skills of operational leaders.