

MEDIA RELEASE

Vero leads the way in filling the skills gap

Vero's successful vPod program to return in 2006

Sydney, 23 March 2006 – One of Australia's leading insurers, Vero Insurance Limited (Vero), has identified a scarcity of specialist technical skills as a central issue for the insurance industry.

According to Vero, the skill shortage in key insurance areas - ranging from reinsurance accounting to risk and compliance, specialist underwriting and relationship management – can more than likely be attributed to underinvestment in training and professional development.

Insurers need to address this issue through a multifaceted, employee-centred HR strategy, Vero's Executive General Manager Corporate Services, Ms Eilis Hurley said.

Ms Hurley said that some insurers were stretching their budgets in a bid to recruit much-needed specialist expertise, but attracting new talent is only one side of the equation.

"Today, insurers must also work hard to retain the people they have.

"This means looking at HR management in a way that is still new to many insurance companies. That is, taking an employee-centred approach and investing in developing expertise, professional skills and leadership ability," she said.

"For an industry that has not traditionally been strong on people development, this is a key challenge that will see the forward-thinking companies emerge from the pack."

In 2005 Vero launched one of its key professional development initiatives, vPod, an eight-month management and leadership program designed for mid-level managers and team leaders.

Two vPod programs were implemented in 2005, one for team leaders/experts and one for strategic implementers/senior experts. The program began in May. In December, 35 Vero employees successfully graduated.

Vero's HR Development Manager, Vanessa Porter designed the vPod program in association with the Forum Corporation and organisational psychologists EEK.

vPod is built on a series of two-day intensive "pods". Participants are given training tailored to their own development needs and are assigned a coach to guide them through the program, giving high-potential employees exposure to the wider organisation and an opportunity to develop networking and leadership skills.

vPod's overwhelming success in 2005 meant that employees from various business units registered their interest prior to HR calling for nominations this month.

"vPod is currently undergoing formal evaluation, however, initial feedback has indicated 100% of employees attending last year's vPod would recommend the program to their colleagues reflecting the high level of value gained. Vero will be running one and potentially two vPod programs in 2006," said Ms Hurley.

vPod is only one of several new HR initiatives designed to drive higher performance throughout Vero and provide its next generation of leaders with the skills necessary to maintain industry leadership in the medium-term.

Other initiatives include a Summer School that builds core technical and strategic capability, a 360-degree online performance management system based on success profiles and an employee value proposition model. The model will enable employees to build personal development and professional aspirations and reward/recognition incentives into formalised working relationships with Vero.

"Vero sees a forward-looking HR philosophy as an important differentiator in a fiercely competitive industry.

"Creating career paths within Vero and investing in personal professional development not only serve the company's needs, but also help us attract and retain staff at a crucial point in the insurance industry cycle," she said.

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Editor's note

Vero Insurance Limited ("Vero") is a subsidiary of the Promina Group Limited, which is one of the top 50 companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange. Vero, formerly Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance Australia Limited, has for many years been offering highly specialised solutions to its large range of customers.

Vero is one of Australia's largest intermediated general insurance companies and has 19 branches across Australia, providing a suite of quality specialised and risk management products and services through brokers, corporate partners and risk managers.

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