

Mr David Willis Johnson

The degree of Degree of Science in Economics (honoris causa) was conferred upon David Willis Johnson in 1998.

Citation

Chancellor

David Willis Johnson graduated in Economics at the University of Sydney in 1954, received a Diploma of Education in 1955, and in 1958 was one of the first Australians to receive an MBA from the University of Chicago. On these educational foundations, he has built a business career remarkable not just for its financial successes, but for the quality of his leadership and the ideas that drive him. He has said that he is "a business hell fighter", and it has been said of him that he is a "fierce competitor" and "the most successful Australian empire builder".

He began his business career as an executive trainee for the Ford Motor Company in Geelong, Victoria, where he won a Rotary Foundation Fellowship to study at the University of Chicago. In 1959, he became a management trainee at Colgate-Palmolive International in Australia, and, in 1967, became Chairman and Managing Director of its South African operation.

In 1973, he went to Hong Kong as President of Warner-Lambert/Park Davis Asia, and, in 1976, he moved to the United States as President of two successive divisions within that company. In 1979, he became head of Entermanns Inc., and continued as President and CEO when it was acquired by General Foods in 1982. During his leadership of this Company, sales and profits quadrupled, and when, in 1987, he was named Chairman, President and CEO of Gerber Products, earnings grew at an annual rate of more than 50 per cent.

David Johnson joined Campbell Soup Company in 1990 as President and CEO - a position from which he retired in 1997. Under his leadership, the Company's value increased by an average of 23 per cent a year. He developed pay - for performance plans for executives, and insisted on rigorous corporate governance standards for boards. In 1996, the Board of Campbell Soup was named the Best Board in America, and, in 1997, David Johnson was named the Director of the Year - a title which also recognised his contribution to many other company boards.

If we in Australia had lost sight of David Johnson during his long career in the United States, we received a sharp reminder of his presence in 1992/3 when Campbell Soup Company made a takeover bid for Arnott's Biscuits. This event has been described as "a battle full of symbolism. A so-called Australian icon - a picture of a parrot eating a biscuit - was about to fall into American hands".

Yet David Johnson attributes his success and what has been called "his raw energy and competitive fire" to the bush realities he grew up with near Tumut in the Snowy Mountains. He rode bareback from the family farm to the one room Lacmamac Public School. "The country taught you self-reliance", he has said. "If the tractor broke down, and you couldn't grind a valve, where were you? Work had nothing to do with days of the week or hours of the day." That bush philosophy is at the heart of the legends of the Snowy River country and its real and fictional inhabitants. Perhaps it also explains his appearance at a staff meeting at Campbell in jockey silks where he addressed the staff as "my fellow thoroughbreds".

He went as a boarder to Newington, where he captained the first XV rugby and cricket teams. He continued his sporting career at Wesley College, where he captained the rugby, athletics and cricket teams, was Senior Student, and won a University rowing Blue.

In the Faculty of Economics, one of his teachers was Hermann Black, who, Johnson remembers, "talked about conquering the world" - which is what he was determined to do. Quotations which he finds inspiring are: "Vision is the ability to see the invisible" and "A mind that is stretched by an original idea never returns to its original dimension." He has been described as "a master motivator" for whom "communication is the staff of life". He believes that "we are only limited by what we dream can be possible." When he signs his letters he adds a crisp summary of his guiding principle, *Carpe Futurum*.

Chancellor, I present David Willis Johnson for the award of the Degree of Science in Economics, honoris causa, and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.