

## James Strong AO



James Alexander Strong AO (1944-2013) was a leading Australian businessman, a strong supporter of the arts, and an enthusiastic sportsman. He was a man of many parts, a splendid work colleague, and a close and always interesting and stimulating friend. I had the privilege of working closely with him for many years while we were both on the board of Australia's largest retailer, Woolworths Limited.

James held an impressive array of appointments over the years.

He was perhaps best known as Chief Executive of Qantas (and prior to that CEO of Australian Airlines, formerly TAA), but he was also Chairman of the large Australian legal firm Corrs Chambers Westgarth, and earlier in NZ was CEO of DB Breweries. He was Chairman of Woolworths Limited and IAG, the large insurance group, Rip Curl and Kathmandu.

In the arts world, he was Chairman of the Australian Council for the Arts, the Sydney Theatre Company, the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, the Australian Business Arts Foundation, the State Library of Victoria, and was a Director of Opera Australia.

He was very active in sports including being a member of the Australian Grand Prix Association, a director of Dorna Sports which administers motorcycle racing (James was a keen motor cyclist), and Chairman of V8 Supercars and of the organising committee for the 2015 Cricket World Cup.

In 2001 James was awarded the Centenary Medal and in 2006 he became an Officer of the Order of Australia.

I was asked to pay a tribute to James on the occasion of his retirement as Chairman from Woolworths Limited after 12 years as Chairman and a Director. Here is the text of my remarks:

Jeanne-Claude and James, Grant and Mary, Directors past and present, Members of the management team, Ladies and gentlemen

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It is an unusual privilege to have been asked by Ralph and Grant to be the MC for this special evening. The bad news is that it reflects the fact that my age is greater than I hope any of you might guess. But the good news is that it allows me to reflect on how many people are here tonight who have made Woolworths the great company that it is, and to reflect on the splendid contribution James has made to leading the board as our Chairman since 2001.

Can I pay a special tribute to our previous CEO's who are here tonight, Roger and Michael, and their lovely wives, Rosemary and Karen; as well as to our other quasi-retirees John and Glenn, Leon and Caroline, Bruce and Jill, and Rohan and Julianne. I know that Jeanne-Claude and James will be touched that you could join us this evening.

I have been reflecting on how it came to pass that James and I were asked to join the board in 2000. In my case I thought it was a case of mistaken identity since the unquestioned shopper in our family, with worldwide retail experience, was - you guessed it - Gillian. On the other hand, in thinking about James shopping experience, I had to admit that he was miles ahead of me but I could not see how his areas of expertise related much to Woolworths, given that his specialisations were essentially bow ties and motor bikes. But there we are. We joined up and the rest is history.

Have you recently read James CV ? It reads rather like a Who's Who of the worlds of business, sports and arts, all combined in some splendid and wonderful way.

From motor biker to theatre goer, from beer magnate to aeroplane enthusiast, from bow ties to merchant banking, from cricket to supermarkets, from beach gear to ANZAC centenary, from climbing mountains to mining under them, from legal eagle to insurance whiz, from grand prix to philanthropist, from honorary doctorate to adjunct professor, from surfie to arts lover, you name it, James has not just tried it but he has succeeded in it and often lead it.

James Strong is a man of many parts.

His multiple roles and his leadership in many of them have bestowed him with honours. He is an Officer of the Order of Australia, the holder of an Honorary Doctorate, an Australian Centenary Medal for contributions to aviation and the arts, the Sir Charles McGrath Award for Excellence in Marketing, the Monash University and Mount Eliza Alumni Award for Leadership and the Smithsonian Institute's Laureate Hall of Fame Award for Commercial Air Transport. He continues to hold multiple positions of influence and substance beyond Woolworths which will keep him happily occupied and ensure an ongoing contribution to leadership in many spheres in Australia.

So that is James, the man of great diversity, who has lead Australia's top arts bodies, held senior government appointments, been CEO and chaired both large and small companies, and been a leader in much of the sporting world. In between all of that he has been our Chairman for the past 12 years.

But what about James the personal man ?

These are the words that come to my mind.

Thoughtful, insightful, patient, tolerant, strongly commercial yet also intuitive, smart and brainy, very good with people, a relationship builder, a team player, persuasive but not aggressive, articulate but with an ability to recognise the contributions of others, a splendid conversationalist but a good listener, a clever strategist and a tactician, empathetic to the feelings of others, accepting and welcoming of diversity, a pleasure to work with and to socialise with.

So to an unique extent, James is very much a man for the times and of the times, as indeed has been acknowledged by his wonderfully wide array of jobs and activities.

These attributes have made him an ideal leader for a huge company like Woolworths and for our board in particular. His relationships with management have been peerless.

Moreover, the great bonus for the rest of us has been the way in which James has been such a pleasure to work with. He has made board meetings enjoyable, or at least most of the time, and a truly participatory forum.

In all the amazing array of activities which James has pursued he has had the unfailing support of a person who herself is gifted in great and diverse measure. Jeanne-Claude is multiply qualified, having graduated in medicine, finance, investment, literature, and philosophy. She is hugely well read. She can fly planes, climb mountains, sail boats, all to the highest world standards. James has been the great beneficiary of this remarkable set of talents and indirectly so too have we all been. So thank you very much indeed Jeanne-Claude for your contribution to James' success and thus to Woolworths more broadly.

The other person who has been the great supporter in James life has been Tracey. Moreover, she has supported the rest of us too. Her ability to understand James and track him down when he is needed has been rewarded with our unending gratitude, to say nothing of deep respect. Thank you hugely Tracey from all of us.

Finally ladies and gentlemen, can I on behalf of my board colleagues and of the management team and all of us here tonight express to James our warmest and deepest appreciation for a remarkable and splendid period of leadership of Woolworths Limited.

It has been a great journey and we have been honoured to have participated in it with you.

To Jeanne-Claude and James, we wish you all the very best for a happy and healthy future.

Sir Roderick Deane