TOP BLOKES
FOUNDATION



BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNICATION, CONNECTION & WORKPLACE CULTURE

AUSSTEEL CASE STUDY

ORGANISATION: AusSteel

LOCATION: Newcastle, NSW

PROGRAM: Top Blokes Workplace Program

PARTICIPANTS: 7 men

PROGRAM LENGTH: 8 weeks

AT A GLANCE

AusSteel partnered with Top Blokes to support seven men through an eight-week Workplace Program focused on communication, emotional regulation, conflict management, mental health, peer support and workplace connection.

For AusSteel, the program needed to support individual wellbeing and strengthen team culture in a male-dominated workplace, giving participants practical tools their staff could use at work and in life.

By the end of the program, participants reported stronger connection with colleagues, greater confidence managing disagreements and improvements in mental health support, optimism and emotional regulation.

Most importantly, AusSteel began seeing those changes show up on the factory floor.

AusSteel®

THE OPPORTUNITY

AusSteel is a busy workplace near Newcastle, NSW, employing more than 110 people.

General Manager, Emma Tonkinson saw an opportunity to provide more targeted support to the men in the business. She recognised that while rules, policies and procedures are important, workplace culture is also shaped by the way people communicate, manage pressure, respond to conflict and support each other.

"We do have quite a male-dominated workforce out there, and sometimes that's quite challenging to be able to support those guys."

Emma was also aware that people do not leave their personal challenges at the door when they arrive at work. Relationship pressures, mental health challenges, financial stress, gambling, drugs, alcohol and other life pressures can all affect how someone shows up in the workplace.

The opportunity was to give men practical skills early, before challenges escalated or began affecting their work, relationships and wellbeing and for the men to learn how to support each other.

WHAT THE PROGRAM INVOLVED

The Top Blokes Workplace Program provided participants with a structured space to discuss issues that are often difficult to raise at work.

Across the eight-week program, participants explored practical topics linked to:

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

COMMUNICATION

MANAGING DISAGREEMENTS & CONFLICT

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

PEER SUPPORT & RELATIONSHIPS

FINANCIAL CONFIDENCE

OPTIMISM & FUTURE FOCUS

REFLECTION & PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The program was delivered in a way that helped the group feel comfortable, respected, and safe participating.

Participants reflected that the program helped them slow down, think about the bigger picture and reflect on how they respond to different situations.

They also valued being in a group with men at different stages of life. Hearing from others helped participants learn from different experiences and recognise that everyone carries different pressures.

The group environment was a key part of the impact. Participants felt comfortable talking openly because the space was non-judgmental and easy to engage in.

IMPACT SNAPSHOT

OUTCOME AREA	RESULT
Participants felt more connected to their colleagues since participating in Top Blokes	100%
Participants felt Top Blokes showed them how to manage disagreements and conflicts	100%
Feeling there are people in their life they can reach out to for their mental health	25% improvement
Participants reporting they often became very angry or lost their temper	18.75% reduction
Keeping opinions to themselves to avoid disagreeing with people	11.11% reduction
Knowing what to do to have good mental health	5.56% improvement
Feeling optimistic about the future	13.89% improvement
Feeling confident in their ability to manage finances	5.26% improvement

These results are especially important because they reflect both personal and workplace outcomes.

Participants were not only building self-awareness and wellbeing skills. They were also becoming more connected to each other, more confident navigating conflict and more able to speak up.



WHAT CHANGED AT WORK

While the program was still underway, Emma was already seeing changes in the men taking part.

"I've seen more reliability from them, which is really good, accountability and some changes."

She noticed participants becoming more engaged, more connected and more willing to contribute to the team.

"They are communicating more."

"The guys that are in the program, there's definitely a lot of teamwork, which is fantastic as well."

For a manufacturing environment, those changes matter.

Better communication helps reduce tension.

Stronger teamwork helps people work more effectively together. Greater accountability helps team members take more ownership of their roles and their impact on others.

Emma also noticed some team leaders beginning to think differently about how work happened on the floor. Rather than simply doing the task and moving on, they were starting to come forward with ideas about how to improve team connection and engagement.

"What I'm seeing now is a change in their thoughts."

"I've definitely noticed they're thinking outside the square and they're coming up with some great ideas within the factory"

That shift from task completion to team contribution was one of the clearest signs that the program was influencing workplace culture.

MANAGING FRUSTRATION DIFFERENTLY

One of the most practical changes Emma noticed was in how some participants managed frustration.

Before the program, if someone was visibly frustrated, the response may have been to send them home or ask them to step away because they were not handling the situation well.

Through the program, participants were learning to pause, recognise what was happening and continue with their work in a calmer way.

"Whereas now they're able to take that breather and continue on whilst in the workplace."

This is where the program's impact became very practical.

Emotional regulation is not just a personal wellbeing skill. In a workplace, it affects safety, communication, productivity and team culture. When people have the tools to pause before reacting, small frustrations are less likely to become bigger issues.

Emma also noticed this shift in behaviour: **"I've seen them become a little bit more calmer."**

For AusSteel, this meant men were better able to manage pressure in the moment and stay engaged in the workday.

BUILDING PEER SUPPORT

Another key impact was the connection forming between participants.

The program gave men a reason to talk beyond the usual day-to-day work conversations. It helped them understand each other differently and build trust as a group.

Emma noticed that too, **"I can just see a bit of a more of a bond among the group."**

She also saw the potential for the men to become a stronger support network for each other beyond the program.

"They are becoming a bit more of a supportive network, and I think that is going to be excellent."

This matters because many men are not always comfortable asking for help directly. A stronger peer network can make support feel more natural, accessible and trusted.

The program results also reflected this shift, with 100% of participants saying they felt more connected to their colleagues since participating in Top Blokes.

PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

Participants described the program as a chance to slow down, step back and think about the bigger picture.

They reflected that it gave them the ability to think more deeply about their actions, reactions and relationships. Rather than simply moving through the workday, the program created space to pause and consider how they respond to pressure, conflict and different situations.

Participants also valued learning from each other. The group included men at different stages of life, which meant people could hear different perspectives and draw on each other's experiences.

The group setting was also important. Participants felt comfortable talking because the environment was respectful and non-judgemental. That sense of safety made honest conversation easier.

For many workplaces, that is a powerful outcome in itself. When men feel safe enough to talk, reflect and listen, stronger connection becomes possible.



WHAT LEADERSHIP NOTICED

A CULTURE BUILT ON PEOPLE

For AusSteel, the Top Blokes Workplace Program did not create a new culture from scratch. It strengthened the culture the business had been building for almost two decades.

When AusSteel started 19 years ago, the business was built on one core belief: help people grow personally and professionally, and they will help the business grow too.

That belief had shaped the company from day one. But the Top Blokes Workplace Program gave the team practical tools to bring that culture to life in real moments. Darren Onley, AusSteel, President and CEO reflects:

"WHAT TOP BLOKES HAS DONE IS GIVE OUR TEAM THE TOOLS TO ACTUALLY LIVE THAT OUT — NOT JUST TALK ABOUT IT."

HANDLING CONFLICT DIFFERENTLY

One of the clearest examples came when a conflict recently arose with a labour hire team member. Instead of the situation escalating, AusSteel team members stepped in, de-escalated it maturely and supported the person through it.

For leadership, that moment showed the program was translating into real workplace behaviour. Darren adds,

"THAT'S NOT AN ACCIDENT. THAT'S BLOKES WHO'VE LEARNED HOW TO SIT WITH DISCOMFORT AND DEAL WITH IT PROPERLY INSTEAD OF AVOIDING IT OR LETTING IT BLOW UP"

SPEAKING UP WHEN IT MATTERS

AusSteel also noticed team leaders speaking up more actively around workplace safety.

They were putting their hand up, calling things out and backing themselves in moments that mattered.

These shifts reflected the values AusSteel had always tried to build the business on: simplicity, efficiency, growth, authenticity and respect.

"THE PROGRAM HASN'T CHANGED OUR CULTURE — IT'S SHARPENED IT."

A PRACTICAL INVESTMENT IN PEOPLE

For AusSteel, the value of Top Blokes was clear. The program helped strengthen communication, improve how people handled confrontation and build a stronger sense of support between team members.

"OUR GUYS COMMUNICATE BETTER, THEY HANDLE CONFRONTATION BETTER, AND THEY SHOW UP FOR EACH OTHER BETTER."

That is why leadership saw the program as more than a wellbeing initiative. It was a practical investment in the people who build the business every day.

"ANY BUSINESS, NO MATTER HOW STRONG THE CULTURE ALREADY IS, WILL GET A RETURN ON INVESTING IN TOP BLOKES. IT'S NOT A SOFT ADD-ON — IT'S A GENUINE INVESTMENT IN THE PEOPLE WHO BUILD YOUR BUSINESS EVERY DAY."

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR BUSINESS

The AusSteel case study shows that workplace wellbeing is not just about responding when something goes wrong.

It is about creating the conditions for people to communicate earlier, manage pressure better, build stronger relationships and feel more connected to the people around them.

For AusSteel, the Top Blokes Workplace Program helped create visible change in:

- Team connection
- Communication
- Conflict management
- Emotional regulation
- Reliability
- Accountability
- Peer support
- Workplace culture

Emma saw the value not only for the men taking part, but for AusSteel as a business.

"I think it's exciting for us as a business just to be able to see those changes and improve the culture I think that we've had out there."

She also recognised that the skills participants gained could continue to support them beyond work.

"And not just, again, a certificate, but walk away with skills that they can use within their whole life."

That is the strength of the Top Blokes approach. The program supports the person, not just the employee. And when people are better supported, workplaces benefit too.

THE OUTCOMES

AusSteel partnered with Top Blokes to give seven men practical support over eight weeks.

The program created space for real conversations, helped participants feel more connected to their colleagues and gave them tools to better manage conflict, frustration and personal challenges.

The result was stronger connection, better communication and visible change on the factory floor.

For Emma, the program gave AusSteel a way to support men in a meaningful and practical way.

> **"I'M REALLY HAPPY THAT WE'VE ENGAGED WITH TOP BLOKES AND THAT THEY'VE GIVEN US THE ABILITY TO BE ABLE TO CHANGE THAT CULTURE OUT THERE."**

KEY OUTCOMES

Through the Top Blokes Workplace Program, AusSteel participants reported:

- Stronger connection with colleagues
- Greater confidence managing disagreements and conflict
- Improved access to mental health support networks
- Improved optimism about the future
- Increased confidence managing finances
- Better understanding of how to support good mental health
- Reduced likelihood of becoming very angry or losing their temper
- Greater confidence speaking up instead of avoiding disagreement

These outcomes show the impact of giving men practical tools, structured support and a safe space to talk.

BUILD A SAFER, MORE RESILIENT WORKPLACE

Could your workplace benefit from stronger communication, better team connection and practical support for men?

Top Blokes works with businesses to deliver practical, engaging workplace programs that help men build confidence, resilience, communication skills and healthier relationships at work and in life.

Our Workplace Program is designed to support employees while also strengthening workplace culture, team connection and psychological safety.

Bring Top Blokes to your workplace. Book a free disovery call today. We'll chat through your organisation, your employees and what you want to improve.

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