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CAMERON ENGLAND



MEETING OF MINDS: Lisa Marie Jenkins and Donny Walford have teamed up to introduce women's mentoring program Behind Closed Doors to the US. Picture: SAM WUNDKE

DONNY Walford's Behind Closed Doors program which supports female leadership development has expanded internationally.

Ms Walford has teamed with Florida-based consultant and executive coach Lisa Marie Jenkins to run the course in the US, following a meeting of minds a couple of years ago.

"Lisa and I have been videoconferencing for two years, we share the same passion for developing women and helping women succeed faster than they thought they could, through mentoring," Ms Walford said.

The Behind Closed Doors program involves mentoring and a program in which women from diverse occupational backgrounds come together to share their experiences.

"Having that collective, having like-minded women sitting around a room with very different industry sector experience, backgrounds and different levels of leadership, being able to share that information in a safe environment is really valuable," Ms Walford, who herself is on the board of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, said.

"You can have some really tough, deep conversations that you might not be comfortable having with men in the room."

Each group is run by a facilitator who is a high-profile woman, usually on national or international boards.

"The reason being is my whole vision is to get more women into executive roles, to build the pool for more female board positions," Ms Walford said.

Ms Walford and Ms Jenkins were put in contact through colleagues in the engineering sector, including Andrew Downs from Sage Automation.

The US program launched in October in Tampa, and Ms Jenkins, who has a background in large technology companies such as Cisco and Xerox will be building out the network over time.

The program will start with one group for executives and another for entrepreneurs. It is invite-only.

Ms Walford says that since the program started in mid-2008, 55 per cent of executive members have attained one or more board positions, 32 per cent received promotions and 25 per cent have been nominated for awards.

BCD runs seven executive groups in Adelaide and also operates in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth.

The expansion has been supported by a State Government Export Partnership Program grant.

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