

# the interview

## Johnpaul Dimech, Sodexo Australia & New Zealand chief executive officer

*With responsibilities ranging from feeding the denizens of workers within the mining industry to a host of facilities management services, Sodexo Australia & New Zealand chief executive Johnpaul Dimech is at the forefront of a maintained push to ensure the comfort of mining sector employees. The mantra behind his company is creating a village life that makes every day a better day.*

*Editor Travis Macrae spoke with Mr Dimech about his experiences in the industry and the challenges that lay ahead.*

**Q. What was your first job out of school or university?**

**A.** My first job was at a young age of 16 as an apprentice chef. I knew at the time I loved the services industry and working with people, but being a chef was not for me.

My short cooking experiment sent me back to school to study business management while working in the leisure and sporting sectors.

**Q. How and when did you get involved in the minerals and resources industry?**

**A.** The first opportunity I had to get involved in the resources sector was in 2002, when I was managing director of our Singapore business.

Sodexo was a key partner to a major oil and gas company where we were providing on-site service solutions to projects on Jurong Island.

**Q. What are some of the major changes you've seen during your years in the industry?**

**A.** Sodexo's involvement with the national resource employer group Australian Mines and Metals Association has resulted in our being at the forefront of many of the workplace policy issues facing the industry over the years.

This has seen us actively involved in looking at issues such as skilled migration, the impact of changes to

the nation's industrial relations laws, [and] the provision of training as well as strategies designed to enhance the participation of indigenous employees and women across the sector.

We are at the forefront of current policy debate and discussion during an extremely exciting period for the industry in Australia.

It faces some pretty significant challenges over the next few years, given the anticipated shortages of skilled labour predicted to hit operators.

In addition I have experienced major changes in expectations of the village residents and our partners. Our challenge is to attract and retain the best talent available to achieve the common objectives of our partners and Sodexo.

Diversity is now a key component of our recruitment strategy and includes indigenous and women employees, who are key to the resources sector. We have also seen the industry evolve, with safety being the key focus, and our commitment to safety is one of our core drivers.

**Q. Could you describe any challenges your company has faced in supplying remote services?**

**A.** The sourcing of skilled labour continues to be a challenge. This is why we put so much importance on our attraction and retention strategies to support our continued growth and maintain a high-quality service delivery.

**Q. Is yours an industry that is facing labour challenges?**

**A.** As a key partner, we face the same challenges as many others in the industry. To date our resourcing strategy has been successful, however, we continue to explore innovative ideas to ensure we remain an employer of choice.

**Q. Is enough being done to address shortcomings in the national pool of skilled labour?**

**A.** The Government's current immigration initiatives are a move in the right direction, however, we believe that there is more to achieve on this front.

We continually seek further training and development opportunities, particularly in relation to indigenous employment in remote areas, to ensure we have skilled labour from diverse groups.

**Q. These are currently exciting times for Australian miners. What do you believe are the biggest issues currently facing the resources industry?**

**A.** The biggest issue is attracting great employees and then retaining them, and thus truly understanding what motivates an individual to commit to a career within the resources industry is critical to ensuring we build the right environment to deliver our services.

**Q. What part of your career has awarded you the most satisfaction?**

**A.** Prior to my current role in Australia, I spent three years as chief executive of Sodexo India, based in Mumbai.

The Indian experience was both rewarding and life changing from a personal and professional point of view. Managing growth while shaping the foundation of our business in such a diverse, fast-paced environment was truly satisfying.

**Q. What is the best piece of advice you have ever received and who gave it to you?**

**A.** Our founder and chairman Pierre Bellon is well known for his quote "we have the right to make mistakes as long as we learn from them".

**Q. What do you believe is the greatest achievement in your career so far and why?**

**A.** To be in my current leadership role, shaping the future of Sodexo in Australia and New Zealand. A very recent achievement, for example, has been to work with a highly engaged leadership team launching our Reconciliation Action Plan to help close the gap for indigenous Australians.

**Q. Who has been the biggest inspiration in your life and why?**

**A.** Having spent so much time in India it's hard to look past Gandhi. His selfless plight to achieve change and democracy far outlive the man himself.

**Q. What is your favourite holiday destination?**

**A.** The culture and colour of Asia make it a tempting option each time a holiday comes up.

**Q. What is your ultimate retirement dream?**

**A.** Living on a 20-acre hobby farm on the Bellarine Peninsula with alpacas, Chinese silkies and a small vineyard. This would keep my wife and I busy, and create a place for our four children to visit with our future grandchildren.

