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Diverse Building SOLUTIONS

With a recent acquisition under its belt and a new CEO, Nomad Building Solutions is in a great position to continue its proven track record of innovative project developments in regional and remote areas.

Images by Fullframe Photographics

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- Heather Gardner

Nomad Building Solutions is a publicly listed company that looks after a diversified group of construction, manufacturing, and property development management businesses throughout Australia. Its impressive credentials include everything from houses to hospitals, apartments to police stations, and land subdivisions to office blocks. Nomad comprises McGrath Homes, Nomad Rental Properties, Nomad Group, and the recently acquired Bloomer Constructions.

Heather Gardner is the newly appointed CEO of Nomad and sees great potential for the future of the organisation. She says that while the past seven or so months have come with several challenges, she has been able to adapt her leadership style and initiate a

transformational journey to pledge years of success for the business.

“The foundations of the business were great, and the opportunity for the business to identify other acquisitions and so forth definitely had a solid base to work from,” she says. “I am very operationally focused with a hands-on approach, and therefore I am able to get into the nuts and bolts of the business and have a look at what we need to do to make it the best it can be.”

Heather has been in the construction industry for more than 25 years and has been exposed to many experiences which have prepared her well for her current position. She has served as a long-term senior executive for FK Gardner Group, and has had roles with CSR and ANZ Banking Group. A couple of years ago, she also completed her Master of Business Administration.

Heather brings to the Nomad brand a strong business acumen, organisational, logistic, and problem-solving skills, along with an exceptionally high commitment to customer satisfaction.

“I joined Nomad on November 10 as a non-executive director to start with, and after a two-week period the board clearly felt it was necessary to again have a leader of the company, whereas previously they had felt that they didn’t need a person there, with the contraction of Nomad. They identified that and then asked me if I’d consider the role, and here I am. I believe I’ve got something to offer and that I am able to help rebuild the company and make a transformational move to get it to where it needs to be.

“It’s always a challenge when you come into a role where, I suppose, McGrath was the only business >



that was predominantly left within the Nomad brand. So initially my role was to do a review of the business and see what areas could be improved. Sometimes when you're the last flagship of the company, you can become a little bit complacent. I think they had just lost a little bit of direction.

"Having a fresh energy and fresh eyes and doing some change management were things I focused on. I wanted to show the Nomad team where they needed to be, why they needed to be there, and how they needed to change.

"Fortunately, a number of key staff that we had here acknowledged those things as well. I think if you come in with a can-do attitude and you're actually prepared to work alongside them to do the things that need to be done, then it is a lot different from telling them what they need to do and leaving them to their own devices. That's never a good start. Just

helping them, counselling them, and coaching them in where we needed to be was advantageous—celebrating the little wins, and then they have the potential to just keep compounding. It's early days yet, but it's responding very nicely."

According to Heather, the first thing that needed to be addressed was the culture within the Nomad group. She looked at the business's processes and procurement strategies to see how things were running and what improvements needed to be made.

First, she recognised that a multifaceted approach was necessary to "turn the ship around". "I had to take a holistic view of the company," she explains. "This means that there wasn't one particular area that got more concentration than another. In some areas, all that was needed was a tweak, whereas in others it was a more radical change, but every segment was looked at.



"There were certainly some changes at the top part of the organisation that had to occur, and this has resulted in a renewed energy and also a sense of empowerment within our people to actually run the business. They're technically sound. I just support them in their decisions and philosophies, and usually, with guidance, they do what they need to do, which is great. I believe if you can surround yourself with smart people, then it makes your job a hell of a lot easier."

There are three core values that Heather has been working to instil in Nomad staff: honesty, integrity, and best possible outcomes, which can be achieved by underpromising and overdelivering. Being authentic is also part of the mantra, as is treating other people the way you would like to be treated. These ideals extend to suppliers and business partners too.

"If we haven't got sound business partners whose objective is the same as ours, then everything slows down," she notes. "Our partners have been in the industry for a long time and they are trusted relationships. We can rely on them. We know how they work, and it's not always about price. That forms part of it, but it's fundamentally about the service they provide. If something goes wrong, it's about how they respond and how they fix it in a timely manner without too much downtime."

Nomad recently acquired Bloomer Constructions, a leading medium-sized private residential and commercial construction company based in Capalaba, Queensland. As of mid February, Bloomer Constructions had approximately \$158 million in work orders being completed, with a further \$68 million yet to start, making it a significant investment for Nomad. Concurrent with the announcement, Nomad also announced a \$3.5-million capital raising, of which \$1.5 million is to fund the cash component of the Bloomer Constructions acquisition and the remainder for working capital.

Heather says the move was part of Nomad's necessary transformation to expand and increase profitability. Bloomer Constructions has consistently reported solid returns over many years and has a strong reputation in the marketplace, she says. "It will help us to continue to build value within the company and is something that we absolutely needed. It was the right people, the right feel, and the right fit for us. It



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certainly lays a stronger foundation for us to be able to build and rebuild the company so that we can pick up bigger and better things over the coming years."

Heather's objective now is to continue with the integration, aligning staff with the Nomad way of operations. Once the basic foundations and short-term vision have been set, the company can look into other areas such as the training and development of staff on a longer-term basis. Heather believes there are more strategic opportunities out there which Nomad will be able to capitalise on when it's ready. The company is certainly in the business of building business, partnering with the right people, and performing.

"We are really looking at the opportunities for growth. We were based in Western Australia, but now with Bloomer Constructions our reach expands into Queensland as well. We have also done work in the Northern Territory and the Torres Strait.

We're currently building some scale and greater opportunities for the business.

"We are looking to build value so that our income stream becomes a bit more stable in preference to the physical nature of construction. It's always interesting when you come from a private company background like I have and then come in at the CEO level. Being a female in construction is always interesting too. It's all pretty exciting.

"It's early days for me in the role, and obviously in a few years time when we've got runs on the board and more of a laid-out plan, there will be somewhat of a longer-term vision for the company than we have today.

"My role is about getting in, working out what needs to be done at the grass roots, and taking it from there. It will be interesting to see what Nomad looks like in a couple of years, knowing you have had an influence in that." •



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