

60 Second Interview

With Paul O'Sullivan



SECTION ONE: Biography

Mr O'Sullivan was appointed Chief Executive of Optus in 2004. In this role he is responsible for all aspects of the performance and operations of Optus, Australia's second largest telecommunications company.

Mr O'Sullivan assumed the role of Chief Executive after serving as Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Optus for three years. As COO, Mr O'Sullivan managed the four trading divisions of Optus (Mobile, Consumer, Business and Wholesale/Satellite) as well as the Networks, IT and Brand functions.

Between 1998 and 2001, Mr O'Sullivan was the Managing Director of Optus Mobile, the company's largest division. Under his leadership Optus Mobile gained considerable market share; delivered innovative products such as 'yes' Time (encouraging the use of the network in off peak periods); and introduced mobile internet services.

Mr O'Sullivan also has significant group wide management responsibilities in the SingTel group. He sits on the Board of Bharti Airtel, a group joint venture company in India, and is a member of the SingTel Group Management Committee.

Prior to Optus Mr O'Sullivan worked with the Colonial Group. In 1996 he worked with the project team that integrated the State Bank of NSW and launched Colonial's new 'Convenience Banking' concept.

He has previously held various international management roles with the Royal Dutch Shell Group in Canada, the Middle East, Australia and the United Kingdom.

Mr O'Sullivan has B.A. (Mod) Economics, (First Class) Trinity College, University of Dublin and is a graduate of the Harvard Business School's Advanced Management Program.

SECTION TWO: Question & Answer

Question 1: After almost 11 years with Singtel Optus, what keeps you inspired and motivated?

We are Australia's Challenger in Communications – we were created to bring competition to the market. I still get excited as we work to deliver on our reason for existence: to make technology more accessible to Australians and to give them service levels higher than anything the market has been delivering. At Optus we believe we are building Australia's next great business – and one that sets new standards internally in terms of inclusiveness and innovation. All in all – it's an exciting place to work and I love being a part of that team.

Question 2: How do you define success? And to what do you most attribute your success?

I have been privileged to work for some great managers and teachers and along the way learned some core values: in short success is not just about a winning result but getting that result in a way that is sustainable and feels good enough for your team that they will continue to aspire to winning. The four key values that have had the greatest sustained positive impact in my journey are:

1. Focus on the Vital Few: It's a truism that most businesses have a small number of key variables that really "move the needle". It's critical to identify and understand these.
2. Teamwork: In her book "Confidence" Rosabeth Kate Moss profiled teams that outperformed their peers – often from a position of disadvantage. These "giant Killers" and "Disruptors" nearly always have built very strong internal cultures focused on inclusiveness and on confidence about achieving shared goal.
3. Play To Win: Success is not an accident – it is associated with understanding what it takes to achieve and deploying the necessary effort and resource. It's critical to dimension this and to deploy accordingly.
4. No Surprises: An open culture that enforces accountability whilst also encouraging open communication allows the maximum time to correct or even to revisit the game plan.

Question 3: What's the best advice you've been given? And who has been your greatest inspiration?

At school I still recall a Dean who had lived an extraordinary life and seemed well satisfied with it. His advice was to "be yourself": not to try to adapt or change your behaviours or views in pursuit of success. I don't think the Irish personality needs much encouragement! However it has meant that I've always enjoyed the people I work with and had the sense to move on when I sensed it was time to change.

Question 4: If you could talk to one person from history, who would it be and what question would you ask them?

I'd love to meet and talk with Monash: he embodies the true Challenger Spirit as well as being a great Australian. Can you imagine it: he invoked the wrath of the imperial high command by regularly rotating Australian soldiers back from the World War I front and organized food and bathing facilities to keep them healthy. His gutsy efforts saved thousands of lives unlike the less fortunate Irish and British infantrymen. On return to Australia he continued his Public works – an impressive guy who set a great example of practical patriotism without great oratory or publicity.

Question 5: You have just returned from participating in the Global Irish Economic Forum in Dublin. What were the key messages you took away from the event and what actions, if any, has it spurred (or inspired) you to take?

I was very impressed at the organization of the event and at meeting so many successful Irish business and Community leaders who have studiously and without fuss added so much to the Diaspora and their adopted homelands. I also enjoyed meeting Bob Geldof!

My key take outs were:

- The end of the Celtic Tiger is a much exaggerated story: Ireland still has the fundamentals that made it successful for the last decade: adaptiveness; innovation and flexibility. Ireland will re-emerge.
- Ireland has built great success by fostering R&D; high quality education in targeted areas relevant to target industry; and by creating a business environment recognised for good governance and ease of working with regulators. The forum encouraged Ireland's leadership to renew their focus and energy on these areas.
- It's a great place to live and work – it has advanced greatly from the nation I left 26 years ago. I felt a tremendous sense of pride at seeing what has been achieved.

During the forum the comment was made that engagement with the Irish community has the effect of "recharging" the batteries "that for the Diaspora to re-engage with Ireland and assist its cause. The forum certainly did that for me and I have returned with a renewed commitment to assist Ireland as it moves forward.

Question 6: Ireland has one of the largest and strongest Diasporas in the world. What role would you like to see the Irish abroad play in supporting Ireland's return to economic growth?

Realistically we can only play a support role to the efforts and achievements of Ireland - it's critical that the renewal in Ireland's strategies and investments debated at the forum are enacted.

But once Ireland is engaging overseas, the Diaspora presents a terrific network that can provide high quality advice and help navigate our adopted homelands.

It's also very important we keep up the momentum on peace in Ireland. It's easy to assume the achievements of the last decade are here to stay. I believe the Diaspora can play a key role in encouraging the tolerance and diversity that most of us living in the New World have witnessed and experienced. In a range from financial support to moral encouragement we must all keep up the work to support and reinforce peace and integration between Loyalist and Nationalist communities.

Question 7: What do you miss most about living away from Ireland?

Irish bacon, sausages and black pudding.

RTE Radio 1.

The Irish Times.

Family.

And one for good luck... What do you like to do in your free time?

What free time?????? I work for a Challenger - the revolution never stops!