

Paul: Joining me for some retail therapy today in the Amex lounge is Sarah Hunter. The managing director at office works the go-to retailer for so many of us when it comes to office supplies, take equipment and for families when it's time for back to school. And this is obviously my old stomping ground. I joined when I was, there was only two stores and Officeworks is now more than 160 stores across Australia. They are one of the most well-known retail brands in the country, and I'm delighted to have Sarah with me today. Sarah. Welcome.

Sarah Hunter: Thanks, Paul. I'm delighted to be here.

Paul: Well, before we get stuck into those state of retail and how things are at office works, let's go back to the beginning. What was life like growing up for you?

Sarah Hunter: Gosh, well, I won't say how many years I need to go back, but let's say, you know, I grew up in a pretty traditional household with a few differences. I have a younger brother, mum and dad both worked full time, which wasn't always the case. And both professionally, actually both my parents were lawyers when I was growing up and mum was a bit of a trailblazer. And I guess I probably get some of my trailblazing mentality from her certainly. And yeah, grew up in Adelaide, had all the brilliance of growing up in such a safe environment. And, you know, I loved my sport. Loved being outdoors, loves spending time with my family. And then I decided to venture out into the big wide world and do something bold and go into state for university. I was fortunate enough to win a scholarship to uni. So I went to Queensland and and I guess then traveled around in different places in Australia and then over to the UK. So quite I guess, buried upbringing, albeit it started off reasonably traditionally.

Paul: Well, I think coming from Adelaide explains a lot for me now with you, Sarah. So well actually I think that all the best the most articulate people that I know actually come from Adelaide, I think the schooling is always been world-class standards. So it's all credit you. I was trying to give you a compliment. I knew you think I was probably going the opposite way. So, but look, I think having the different state experience puts you in a really good position now residing in Melbourne. Of course. So you've got a really good experience across the country now understand you spent more than 10 years in the UK working in banks and airports. What was that like and why make the transition to retail and maybe what attracted you to the industry?

Sarah Hunter: Yeah, look, I think certainly as I look back on the choices I've made in my career, one of the common themes is that the jobs that I've loved the most, it's always got the customer at the heart of decision-making and really I've loved the companies where bringing the customer to the fore strategically in decision-making has been part of the strategy or where the business was trying to go. I love retail banking for me, the passion that I have for retail banking as opposed to let's say, you know some of that corporate banking love the small business side, love retail banking and the banking business that I worked in was very, very focused on that side. Similarly airports, you know, I was fortunate enough to work for a CEO who was ex Procter and Gamble and was trying to bring to the airport sector at the time, a real step change in terms of putting customer at the heart of decision-making, rather than just being, you know, rather than a mentality of just processing passengers through infrastructure. So going on that journey really helped me understand. And of course, airports are very, very big retailers as well. With very valuable retail space, particularly in London, you know, some of the most valuable retail space certainly before a global pandemic what was in Heathrow and Gatwick. So for me it seemed obvious when I decided that I, I needed to find another sector and I wanted to do

something that was really interesting. It was always going to be somewhere where a customer was at the heart of decision-making and, and very real for me. And retail really excited me

Paul: A lot of those frontline skills, I guess, transfer between from industry to industry. And you've, you're a really good product of that. Now Melbourne's in its fourth lockdown. So when COVID actually hit for the very first time, one of the big challenges, a lot of businesses faced was ensuring their people were adequately set up to work from home. Now I imagine office works would have done quite well out of the pandemic with a rush of people trying to buy home office equipment. What sort of changed from the first lockdown to the fourth lockdown? What have you experienced?

Sarah Hunter: Yeah, look, I think the first thing I would say is that sometimes it's hard leading a team where we have seen such a large benefit, certainly in the early couple of lockdowns to, to our sales and to our business, obey it seen a huge impact emotionally, mentally for our team. So, you know, it's not all rose colored glasses that we have this conversation with. You know, I think one of the interesting things early on was to remind ourselves that it wasn't an accident. Our sales were going well, our business was growing at double digit sales growth before the pandemic. And the fact that we had such strong capability in our team. They really embraced the challenge of the pandemic to actually enable people to work and learn from home safely. So having the stock available, making sure stores were safe, making sure that our team could work from home. We had to get nearly a thousand people working from home in only a matter of days and set up at home, even our own team. I think it is it's a huge credit to the capability of our organization, every level of our organization. So whilst I'm extremely proud of what we did to help Australia and we continue to do lock down for in Melbourne today. You know, and the case numbers are pretty challenging and it's all across Victoria. And I think I remain proud of my team's ability to embrace the opportunity and roll with the disruption and recognize it's really hard for them to personally. We've got, you know, over 50 stores in Vic that a shot at the moment and available for to applicant collect, the fact that in only a matter of hours, we could turn on to applicant collect and we've still got a big delivery business here, but a support center team as well, and a business team that are, that are personally struggling now with homeschooling and or living by themselves and what a fourth lockdown means for them. So my honest view, Paul is our business is strong. It will continue to be strong out the other side of this, and we'll continue to grow and learn how to do business in a new world. Probably the hottest thing with a full flock down is the impact to our team.

Paul: So do you think you've gotten better at it from a servicing, a customer point of view, do you think?

Sarah Hunter: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think, you know, every time we go through this, no matter which state we take learnings and we improve, that's what a continuous improvement mindset is all about and a growth mindset, but the mental health impact of, and the fear associated with what we're going through right now, can't be underestimated. And I think honestly, we will make some decisions as a leadership team in the next couple of weeks around what more we can do to support our team because snap lock downs is one thing. But when you look at the fact that Victoria has been in lockdown for more than four times, any other state that is not to be underestimated in terms of the impact to our customers and our team.

Paul: Yeah, absolutely. Look, our heart goes out to all Victorians who have suffered through this period. It's been certainly very challenging. Now just moving slightly in our conversation, we live in a day and age where more of us are working flexible and COVID has accelerated that trend where people are splitting their time between being at home and in the office. Is that a good or a bad thing for workplaces of the future?

Sarah Hunter: Well, it's a really interesting question. I would say a workplace that's inflexible isn't good. And I would say that a workplace cause there's, there are plenty of businesses before COVID that had a culture of presenteeism that weren't allowing people to bring them, bring their best selves to work and weren't allowing the best talent available to participate in being part of that company or part of that workforce, or even more broadly the workforce in general. I think retail leads the way in terms of the way we embrace flexibility, certainly on the shop floor and in our distribution centers. And I think it's a huge opportunity for us now with everything we've learned through COVID to translate that flexibility into how we work in our support centers. I genuinely have seen the feedback from our team as we have embraced flexibility. And we started that with hashtags in February when we launched our new flexibility policy. The feedback from our team is just both across the whole business on the shop floor, in our DCS, in the support center is just extraordinarily positive and they really recognize that working for a business that cares genuinely about making life work for an individual so that they can be their best selves, be the best parent or partner or the healthiest that they can be that allows them to do that is what they're looking for in an employer. So I see it as a massive opportunity. That said it, flexibility doesn't mean you never connect with your employer. So actually I think they're really genuinely as a watch out for employers who aren't connected to their team and, you know, we have a duty of care to our team members to make sure that they are still checking in and they are still connected and engaging with us as their employer. So we're all going to have to learn new skills and we are all learning new skills on how to make that happen.

Paul: So do you think that this Harvard model is probably the way of the future, partly being at home, partly being at the office and that gets you, it gets the best of both worlds. I take it.

Sarah Hunter: Yeah. I told you and I genuinely think it is being in the right location for the work that you're doing. So when I'm reading board papers, I don't really want to do it in the office. I'm going to do it at home. It's more comfortable. I can see my kids in the morning or in the, it's just a better way for me to be working. Whereas when I'm having collaboration sessions with my team, I, I, to be honest, all the technology in the world, isn't a substitute. Like it doesn't really work. It's so much better face to face.

Paul: It's a bit like horses for courses. I guess that the physical location match the work that you're doing at the time. It's a really good tip actually, because I know that a lot of leaders are really struggling with this area and it looks like, it sounds like to me that you've already worked this all out through, so it's a great help.

Sarah Hunter: Yeah. And I think my only other advice would be to recognize that we're all learning and we're not all gonna have the answer and what is right for us right now might not be right for us in six or 12 months time. So we're just being honest about learning with our team around what works and when it does.

Paul: Yeah. As long as you've got an open communication, keep the conversation alive. So really good tips there. Now, just moving slightly again, we're in an industry that is forever evolving. This is we're talking about working from home and that being certainly had been a new trend. If you think about the last 12 months, new trends that are merging, driven by the massive shift to online, what are some of the things you're specifically seeing?

Sarah Hunter: I obviously have to start with the embracing of technology in all sorts of forms. And the best example I can give of that is, I remember being in a hackathon session with some of our team about two years ago. And one of the suggestions was about how we could use QR codes in store to kind of

provide content to customers. You know, whether it's about a furniture item or a chair or what it's suitable for. And honestly it got canned because the team said customers still don't really understand what to do with QR codes. Well, I can tell you right now, we've just rolled out QR codes for a bit of an endless cycle content experiment in some of our stores, we all know as retailers that our customers are pretty confident now in using QR codes. And that is just something that wasn't there two years ago, Paul.

Paul: You probably shouldn't thank the government for that. Then I would say, don't you think it's great that somebody finally found a, like a really good reason to use a QR code. So given the, all the COVID check-ins now that are happening. So I think it's educated everybody on what a QR code should be, what it can do for us. So

Sarah Hunter: And I know as retailers across the whole sector, you and I've talked about this is, you know, we've seen a whole generation who didn't shop online, shop online and learn how to shop online. So I think but also there's a whole generation who were very active online, who now love being able to go into the store because their ability to do that and their freedom to do that was taken away from them. So I think on one hand, I would say from a customer perspective, you know, the change to digital in a number of ways, it's not just online, shopping is real, but actually I think so many of our customers have rediscovered their love of shopping in store, which is just brilliant. I love it.

Paul: Well, look, I know you're a busy woman and you balance and you juggle all these many, many amazing things that you do. So I want to talk a little bit about leadership and a day in the life of Sarah Hunter. What does a normal day look like for you? When do you get up? And what's on the agenda.

Sarah Hunter: Okay. I think the rhythm in my life mostly comes from my family. So, you know, my children have commitments that they need, you know, so often a day in the life for me would start me up at about four o'clock in the morning because my 18 month old, wants a bottle, or wants a cuddle, then usually, you know, my bed gets crashed by the three-year-old wanting cuddles at about 6:00 AM. And if I'm lucky, I'll try and fit in some form of exercise, but that's, you know, I have to set the bar reasonably low with three young children and then it's just school and trying to find that balance of being present for them being home for bedtime and meal time for them at the end of the day. And then in between, it is really dictated by what's going on in the business. And probably the biggest challenge for me with a work lens from a leadership perspective continues to be where I spend my time and making sure that I'm spending enough time looking forward as opposed to, in the here and now and the trading of the business. And, you know, it's something that I constantly reevaluate kind of every six months. Am I spending enough time with my team? Am I delegating enough? Am I spending enough time looking forward and learning and reading and making sure that I'm expanding my horizons as well, so that I am bringing that external perspective into the choices and the strategic decisions we're making. And that's just a juggle, right? That's hard. And I don't always get it right. Some months. I'm like, oh my God, this was a disaster. I traveled too much. I'm not this smart obviously, but you know, and it just takes, it takes really great support and I've got a phenomenal AI who just makes sure that we're constantly having the conversation around where I spend my time.

Paul: So this is one of the things that a lot of CEOs struggle with, isn't it? Because there's gotta be a balance between dealing with strategically important stuff and operational stuff, because there's particularly in an ASX company where you're driven for results in a very often very short-term perspective. Do you know if you think about your, your, the time that you spend the balance between strategy and operations, if you had to give a percentage weighting, what would that look like?

Sarah Hunter: Yeah, well, I think it really depends on it really depended on the time and the position of my team. So when I joined office works, 60% of my direct reports were vacant. So I was spending most of my time on operational things. Now I'm in a really extraordinary position where I have a fabulous team and I trust them just to get on with stuff. So I actually spend very little of my time on operational matters. I have a really, really capable leadership team who managed that. So for me, I would probably spend about 30% of my time on people related activity because you know, that is a big part of my job. My job is inspiring and leading a team, 30 to 40%. And then also, you know, making sure that my direct reports and my leadership team have the support that they need. And then I would spend probably 10% on operational stuff, just so I've got my finger on the pulse. And then the rest is more about long-term strategic business development opportunities and really being focused on delivering our strategy and growing the business.

Paul: It's really quite striking. That balance is really important, I guess. So when you think about leadership, did it come naturally to you? Did you always have ambitions to get in a role like you have at the moment? Did you aspire to be a CEO?

Sarah Hunter: No. I think, you know, if you asked my best friend or if you asked my dad, they would both say that I was always very naturally someone who put up my hand at school for leadership stuff. Absolutely. But I'll be honest, Paul, I think certainly in the 10 years before I took on this role at office works, it was a constant debate in my head as to I knew I probably could do it and I could probably learn the skills that were needed and I'm constantly learning. And I think that that's really, really important. You recognize that that's part of the journey as a leader is continuing to improve yourself and try and get better at what you do. I think the organization deserves that from you, but it was a constant debate for about a decade as to whether it's the sacrifice was worth it. Whether I could do it in my own way and do it in a way where I still had my number one job front and center, which is being a mum and partner, you know, my, my children and the life that I create with my husband for them, it is my ultimate legacy. Not any business. That, and it's still a debate pole for lockdowns and points bullying. I still ask myself, as I did this morning, can I do it? Can I, you know, how do I keep going? How do I keep it? But you know, it helps when you have an amazing team around you, both at home and at work.

Paul: Do you think you've learned about yourself since being in being in this role? So what, what have you learned about yourself? If you think about the century your appointment?

Sarah Hunter: Probably the biggest thing that I've learned about myself is just being authentically me is okay. And I don't need to be scared of it. Like actually just being yourself. If you can't find a role and you can't embrace an opportunity where you are, who you are, it's just too hard. It's too hard to pretend to be someone else, it's too hard. Yes, sure. We all need volume control and we've got to learn how to behave in certain circumstances and how to manage many agent and lead in a certain way. But I think it's just so important to they bring your whole self to work. I say that to my team. Why wouldn't I do that for myself?

Paul: No, really good, really good point. Really good point. I'm just thinking about the times that we have, and I've had conversations and I know that diversity and sustainability are two topics that are really near and dear to your heart. Sustainability is becoming a key shift for a lot of retailers, if we can detect that question first. And I know it's an important issue for you at office works. How do you see the role of retail in driving sustainability outcomes and what are some of the things that office works has been doing to that you'd like to share?

Sarah Hunter: Yeah, I this is this one's super, super close to my heart. You know, it is cause we talk about it a lot. I just, and it's been a theme in my career, which I kind of didn't really realize until I actually got into retail. I really passionately believe that we all need to leave the world a better place than the well we found and that we have a responsibility for our children and their children and our children's children. And we are custodians of this land or in the case of axes in Australia, you know, we look to our first nations people as custodians of the land and we need to support and embrace everything that they can teach us about how we do that. So I feel genuinely that this is an important part of who I am. It's going to be an important part of any business that I lead and at tame and our customers tell us it's extremely important to them. So therefore we should listen to them and embrace the opportunities that creates. And I think retail because we are one of the largest employers as an industry and also one of the largest influences as employers of young people as well. We have a real opportunity to drive change and step up to the plate in areas where unfortunately, our governments aren't right now. So I think we should, we should leave with our chins. We should lead by example, we should make commitments like we have about continuing to accelerate our recycling about planting trees. So if you come in by paper-based wood fiber products, that office works, we plant two trees for every one purchased. So, so you can come and buy your books or your paper from office works and know you're making a positive difference. And it isn't just planting trees for the sake of it. It's actually restoring habitat through our relationship with restoring Australia, which has a knock on impact. For example, we were planting last year on the barrier reef, which stopped silt into the barrier reef. And the barrier reef is one of the most precious things we have in the world. And we have a responsibility to protect it. You know, similarly when our planting on kangaroo island, we're planting in the bushfire affected areas in new south Wales with our commitments around carbon and climate, and then just doing business well and sensibly. So reducing plastic, I hate single use plastics,

Paul: Truly, truly impressive. I didn't know all that. It just goes to show the leadership Officeworks demonstrate in the series has been significant under your, your time. So that's an amazing coming on, I guess there's lots still more to do, right? So it doesn't just start stop.

Sarah Hunter: No, it doesn't. And you know, I think the whole concept of the circular economy is one that retail can really embrace. And so depending on which part of retail you're in, I'd just encourage you to have the conversation about what more you could be doing in your workplace to really drive a better outcome for our people and our planet.

Paul: Now, one of the challenges, not just for retail, but for business more broadly is creating more diverse and inclusive workplaces. Now as a female managing director, do you think there are still barriers for women in the industry? And if so, how do we overcome them?

Sarah Hunter: Well, Paul, I should maybe ask you that question.

Paul: This is my area of expertise, but I really love to hear your view.

Sarah Hunter: And look, I am delighted in the leadership that you are showing across the IRA in this space, because, you know, it's something that I feel really passionately about. And, and I am in the minority by quite some margin, actually, when I look around the IRA table and I find it really, really concerning more than 50, you know, let's go with the numbers right. More than more than 50% of the workforce in retail are female. We are, I think Paul, the largest employer of a...

Paul: ....Private sector employer in the country. And in one in 10, people are employed in retail. So 1.2 million people work in retail. And when you look at you look up the hierarchy, unfortunately it's gets a little scary where women start disappear, particularly in boardrooms and at the senior management level, but you know, always credit to you, Sarah, because you're always leading by example and it's lovely to you in those forums. And I know there's much to do and we've put together this diversity equality inclusion committee, which you're part of. And you know, we know that you've got lots, lots to add, and I think that the question really comes back to how do you think we overcome these barriers? Because often, mine comes from watching women actually trying to make their families invisible, which are not doing, or they struggle with parental leave and being away for a period of time. And I look at that and think it really does concern me when I see that, because I think women have so much to offer particularly given that most of discretionary purchases, something like 75% discretion repurchase the Dumbo women's. So, you know, I think some of the barriers that are there, have you seen any change, do you think things are getting better or getting easier, or do you think it's been very small, incremental change?

Sarah Hunter: Yeah. I mean, it's interesting because your previous question, you asked me about leadership and I think, you know, there's a well-trodden view that, that the people do need to see role models. And certainly for me, I've had both influential male and female role models. Who've embraced diversity and demonstrated that belonging is really, really important. And I love to say belonging rather than inclusion. That's one of my things, I think it's really important that everyone feels they belong. And then in that context, gender is just the start, but it is the obvious status. And if we can't get gender equality and embrace inclusion and belonging for everyone in our workforce, you know, like it's so much diversity, so much broader than gender, but like, let's start with getting the basics right there. And for me, it starts with the shop floor, right? It starts with, it starts with my team rather than my leadership team or it, I am delighted that in the last 12 months we've reached balanced leadership across every level of our organization.

Paul: I think that's the point though. That's amazing. So again, all credit to you that's part of it, right? So every manager within an organization took that sense of accountability and said, well, I'm actually going to work to get a diverse team of direct reports and that I'm going to knowingly and stridently make sure that it's a 50, 50% gender balance that the workplace will be much a bit better place to be. They don't need to look to up the management tree to have a strategy. It'd be great if there was, but if there's not one, at least just take responsibility for their direct reports would make a big difference.

Sarah Hunter: Yeah, I completely agree, because it's just part of running a good business. Diversity of thought means you're running a good business. And I'm really fortunate that both the men and women in my team and in their teams have embraced that fact. And they totally understand from a values that that is just about running a good business. It isn't a conversation. I haven't had to set an STI target. It's just part of the culture and values of the business that we want to lead and we want to run. But I think back to kind of what has changed, I think particularly for the shop floor, there is a growing recognition of the need to get the hygiene factors, right? So for us, it wasn't an accident that the first formal policy I launched it Officeworks was our growing families policy which is our second primary and secondary care is leave policy that embraced things like surrogacy leave and IVF leave. And it became gender neutral. So it was primary and secondary carers. You know, I have team members who have, and in fact, I have one of my team in the leadership team actually takes surrogacy leave. You know, so I think it is about supporting that. And so we moved to 12 weeks of paid leave for primary carers and two weeks for secondary carers of paid leave that is unusual in the retail sector, but needs to be more common. And then the really big difference for me, I think other than all the other things we need to do about bias

and, and just getting the basics right, is we introduced 52 weeks of superannuation top-up even for unpaid. Because the, the, the issue we've got around people caring for children and then being out of the workforce and the pay gap that that creates is material. And on top of that, to have people walk up to you on the shop floor and say, when I say to them, oh, you've worked for Officeworks for 15 years, and then you will have had this experience. And they say, well, actually it was 17. But when I had my two children, it didn't count. That's not a business that I want to lead. So I want people to be recognized as part of our family and part of our business when they are raising our next generation and taking the opportunity to do that. And being financially secure, which materially improves their mental health through the periods, which is a big commitment to have a child and bringing a child into a family when they're caring for that child. I want them to enjoy the experience and not feel a financial burden that I could somehow lessen, you know, so that improves their mental health through the process. Some, some

Paul: Great work there, Sarah, it's really proud hearing all this stuff because it actually shows that you're progressing in so many not only the actual company, office works, but also the industry by sharing these thoughts. So thank you for doing that. Now, if you had any advice for younger people, particularly young women starting out in the industry, what would it be?

Sarah Hunter: The assignment bus that have for any young men starting out in the industry. Already, one who didn't identify as male or female, right? The same advice for any young person. And that is to embrace up community. And, you know, if someone calls and says, what about this chance, take chances, you know, back yourself and have a go, there's no such thing as a bad choice. You know, it's only bad if you make it twice and you screw up. Right. I kind of always say to myself, you know, take a risk. You know, if you don't enjoy it, you've learned something, if a new opportunity comes to you and you don't enjoy it, that's okay. But equally every time I've been given the chance to do something new and I've jumped in, I've learned something from it. So I've really embrace the opportunity. And yeah, sure. Sometimes it's really frightening, but I think when you young, you know, we're a long time working life is about taking those opportunities. We're all going to have many careers and work in lots of different sectors as the workforce changes and evolves and the nature of work changes and evolves. So we've got to embrace opportunities.

Paul: Some great advice there. Sarah, the retail industry can be a bit crazy at times. So no two days, two days are ever the same. Is there an issue that's keeping you up at night at the moment?

Sarah Hunter: I think probably the only thing, and it doesn't keep me up at night. My children keep me up at night, but if I look back in five years time Paul, and together as an industry, we haven't embraced the opportunity to really make a difference on a couple of these big issues, whether it be sustainability, whether it be fulfilling the rightful role that we have as a large employer to make a material, meaningful difference to training and skills development and employment and diversity and women in the workforce and participation, I'll be disappointed. I'll be disappointed because I do feel we have such a privileged position representing so many people across Australia and retail is such an awesome career and such an awesome place to work. We need to, you know, make sure we are embracing the chance for it to be fully inclusive that people belong and that we really are capturing the opportunity. We have to make a difference.

Paul: What a delight. Sarah, thank you for joining us today. Congratulations on all the work you're doing at office works and all the best for the future.

Sarah Hunter: Thanks, Paul.

Paul: You're about to hear some exclusive bonus content. We have a fireside chat with Robert Tedesco, VP and general manager of global merchant services in Australia and New Zealand at American express about reigniting retail and some key insights from small to medium retailers. Robert, thanks for joining me here in the Amex lounge. What American express's research telling you about the retail all sector coming out of COVID 19.

Robert Tedesco: Thanks Paul. And thanks for having me. Lot of positivity amongst our larger retailers, as we've seen discretionary spend that ordinarily would have gone to travel and entertainment shift to retail. And those retailers who have really strong omni-channel strategies are probably benefiting the most. We've seen that in our numbers as well. Our TNE even now remains at about half of its pre pandemic levels. Most pre pandemic spend with shops is around 25% higher. Having said that our research with small business shows that they're remaining cautious and concerned. Our research amongst more businesses found that less than half of retail SMEs feel optimistic about the year ahead, but 58% said their top business resolution for 2021 is to try new ways to grow their business. So we all need to play a part to help support this ambition, especially during the recovery.

Paul: And what does American Express do to support retailers?

Robert Tedesco: Look, our primary goal is to make it easier to create great mutual customer experiences through a number of ways. We have great data and analysis which can inform better ways to drive. Spend. We have access to our base of high spending customers. We've got participation at events that drive span like our Vogue American express fashion night out. And we have great frictionless experiences that can help create a seamless checkout experiences through our technology and tokenization and not forgetting our flagship small business campaign shops mall, which we've transformed into a year round movement, celebrating the valuable contributions, small businesses make to their communities.

Paul: And tell us more about Shop Small this year. Robert it's been an institution on the retail for a number of years now.

Robert Tedesco: Yeah, it has. And it's a really popular initiative. It's now in its ninth year and we've traditionally held Shops Small in the lead up to Christmas over this year, we're extending this support year round. This is a very effective campaign in driving spend in businesses. As we incentivize American express card members with three extra points per dollar spent with those participating small businesses. Between 2013 and 2020 American express card members have contributed more than \$6 billion to the local small business sector through Shops Small. We want the whole sector in retail to thrive, but we know that those small businesses in particular make up the majority need that little bit of extra support.

Paul: Thanks for joining me in the Amex lands. Robert, it's been great chatting with you.

Robert Tedesco: Thanks Paul.

Paul: Thanks for joining us on the Amex lounge with some retail therapy, make sure you subscribe to our show on apple podcasts or follow us on Spotify. We can be found wherever you listen to your favorite podcasts. For more information about the work we do at the Australian retailers association, head to

our website, [retail.org.edu](http://retail.org.edu). Follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, wherever you love to connect. All the links can be found in the show notes. I can't wait to talk retail therapy with Australia's retail leaders and share these conversations with you. The future leaders, business owners and innovators of the industry.