

UNDER THEIR SKIN

Undercover Boss Australia takes the CEO from the boardroom to the stockroom ... and the CEOs are loving it. **Guy Davis** speaks with a beauty company boss about her week as a worker.

Taking the head of a successful company from the corner office to the coalface has proven a winning formula for the *Undercover Boss* franchise.

The series has emerged as a ratings winner in the US, where it originated, and here in Australia, where the second season of a local version of the show is under way.

This time around, CEOs from businesses as diverse as the YMCA and the Hog's Breath Café are taking a week away from the boardroom to go incognito as an average employee of their own company, seeing first-hand the good and the bad of their day-to-day operations.

The only female boss taking part in the second season of the *Undercover Boss Australia* experiment is Pippa Hallas, CEO of

beauty salon and skin-care product company Ella Bache.

And for Hallas, it's more than simply a business – not only did her grandparents found the Australia and New Zealand branch of Ella Bache, her great-grandaunt was Ella Bache herself.

With a wealth of corporate experience here and abroad before joining Ella Bache in 2004, Hallas has helped take the company from strength to strength. And when *Undercover Boss Australia* was searching for CEOs to take part in its new season, she found she and the program have complementary interests.

"One of the things I had planned at the beginning of the year was spending more time on the frontlines," she said. "So it was one of those things where the show was looking for someone and I was looking for an opportunity to get out there, so it all came together nicely."

Posing as new employee "Liz", Hallas visited a number of Ella Bache salons, bravely tackling the hands-on work of removing unwanted body hair with hot wax ("That poor guy!" she laughed when recalling one treatment) and spraying on fake tan.

"I have a bit of a bull-at-gate personality. I tend to really get in there, but that was a bit nerve-wracking," she said.

But overall, she says, it was an eye-opening and positive experience.

"I guess it could have been a case of 'Be careful what you wish for' but I was reassured more than anything else," said Hallas.

"We're a pretty open company, and I'm certainly not a CEO who's hidden – I'm happy to have people communicate with me and I'm happy to communicate back.

"But this was completely different, and it was really wonderful to go in from a

different angle. It allowed me to see the business from the inside out and to feel part of the team, even if it was only from a small period of time."

And while she was a little nervous about meeting the salon owners and employees who knew her as Liz, she was pleased she got the opportunity to praise and reward their good work face to face.

"The intention of the program is to honour the heroes of these businesses, which is what I got to do," she said. "It was a wonderful and very close interaction we shared."

***Undercover Boss Australia*, Southern Cross Ten, tonight, 8.30pm**
Pippa Hallas episode screening Monday, September 26



Wax on, wax off:
ella Bache CEO
Pippa Hallas steps
to the shoes of
her employees.

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