

McDonald's boss Bell dies aged 44

Charlie Bell, the straight-talking former head of fast-food giant McDonald's, has died of cancer aged 44.

Mr Bell was diagnosed with colorectal cancer in May last year, a month after taking over the top job. He resigned in November to fight the illness. Joining the company as a 15-year-old part-time worker, Mr Bell quickly moved through its ranks, becoming Australia's youngest store manager at 19. A popular go-getter, he is credited with helping revive McDonald's sales. Mr Bell leaves a wife and daughter. "As we mourn his passing, I ask you to keep Charlie's family in your hearts and prayers," chief executive James Skinner said in a statement. "And remember that in his abbreviated time on this earth, Charlie lived life to the fullest." "No matter what cards life dealt, Charlie stayed centred on his love for his family and for McDonald's."

After running the company's Australian business in the 1990s, Mr Bell moved to the US in 1999 to run operations in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. In 2001, he took over the reins in Europe, McDonald's second most important market. He became chief operating officer and president in 2002. Mr Bell took over as chief executive after his predecessor as CEO, Jim Cantalupo, died suddenly of a heart attack in April. Having worked closely with Mr Cantalupo, who came out of retirement to turn McDonald's around, Mr Bell focused on boosting demand at existing restaurants rather than follow a policy of rapid expansion. He had promised not to let the company get "fat, dumb and happy," and, according to Reuters, once told analysts that he would shove a fire hose down the throat of competitors if he saw them drowning. Mr Bell oversaw McDonald's "I'm lovin' it" advertising campaign and introduced successes such as McCafe, now the biggest coffee shop brand in Australia and New Zealand. Colleagues said that Mr Bell was proud of his humble beginnings, helping out behind cash tills and clearing tables when visiting restaurants.