



Mary Dwyer

CEO
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Education

I originally trained as a nurse, which is very different from what I do now. My first basic training was at the Launceston General Hospital and then I completed a post-graduate certificate as a midwife in nursing and went on to do counselling.

From there my education has mainly been through work-based experience but I do travel around the world to do courses that I think are worth it.

First job

Before I started nursing, I worked in a bank. Not long after I finished my nursing post-graduate, I left that profession and went to work at the University of Tasmania as a program development officer in the international students office. I went on to be director of development at St Mary's College in Tasmania before my husband and I bought a hedge and garden business.

Why HR

I've always been interested in business and had that sort of mind because my parents are both business people, so once I left nursing I never really went back apart from some night shift work after having my children.

Within 48 hours of buying our first business, my husband and I realised it was not in a good financial situation. We got to the point where we just had nothing to lose, so I said to my husband: "Why don't we run this business the way we've always wanted?"

We wanted to use management practices that were very much out of the ordinary and 'new age' at that time. We could only afford to hire long-term unemployed people because the government provided assistance for that. We began using methods that were quite 'new age' for the early 1990s, such as working on self-esteem, using visualisation and meditation techniques and developing planning and organisation skills.

The business just grew exponentially. Our employees bought the business off us three years later and we ended up getting a passive income out of it for another three years. I spent some time working for a consulting firm and then decided to start my own consultancy.

Current duties

My business is still small with six full-time staff and another six consultants who we work with very closely. Our work is about 60 per cent national and 40 per cent local so there is a lot of travel but I don't work anything like I used to when

setting up the business.

I spend about half my time doing CEO duties and the other half consulting. We pride ourselves on providing solutions that really have an impact on a business and I'd rather keep the business small and make sure we can do that, than let it grow and lose quality.

Challenges

Probably my biggest challenge was when we bought our first business and realised within 48 hours that it wasn't a good one. Looking back, that was because of my naivety and lack of risk assessment. But, it was also my greatest gift because otherwise I would have just done what the professionals kept saying and not gone out on a limb.

Lessons

My son was diagnosed with mild cerebral palsy and told he'd have trouble walking at about the time we bought our first business. If I'd just accepted traditional medicine, he would always have had challenges and I think my desire to help him be the best he could be using development practices crossed over into how I ran the business. I learnt to take a leap and not give up.

An example of a development practice that I learned with my son and applied to my business is the belief that you can overcome any challenge. You need absolute self-belief.

Professional development

There is always someone in the world doing amazing things and I'm constantly looking around for this. I travel to study all the

time and I look for people who are achieving extraordinary results. I often track them for a while and look for any opportunity to study with them. It doesn't matter if it's formal or informal but I normally go for short, intensive programs. I recently went to Harvard for an intensive leadership program and Sydney for a course with America-based Quantum Leadership.

10-year plan

I've just started developing an international leadership project called 'The 10 Commitments of Leadership', based on researching 10 Nobel Prize winners, such as Nelson Mandela and Mother Therese. I plan to work with any of the Nobel laureates who are still living and am currently trying to get an interview with Mandela. The project will look at the key leadership qualities the laureates had and how they used them to achieve their life's outcomes. I want to develop it into a 10-part leadership program, which will have all sorts of scope.

In my personal life, I'd love to live in New York but my husband is really committed to Tasmania. Having said that, I love the life I have here—I can be doing yoga on Mt Wellington, Hobart in the morning and be in a Sydney boardroom by 11am. That's pretty amazing.

Mary Dwyer spoke with Bridget Cull.

Dwyer presented at this year's AHRI conference on 'Achieving transformational culture change: an award-winning case study'. Impact Solutions won AHRI's state Award for Leaders Excellence in 2006.