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Growing great businesses

Stuart Lindsay
Director, Business Consulting
Melbourne

Do you have a great business? Do you know what's required to make your business great?

We all know a great business when we see one but can we define what makes it great? More importantly, can we objectively examine our own business to identify where, and how, to improve?

A great business is one that does exceptional things day after day. Owners, employees and customers of great businesses enjoy the benefits they provide. Striving for a great business means you don't settle for good, better or even best, and in doing so you attract the attention and the rewards that make it all worthwhile.

So what is a great business? A great business is one:

- Which is very profitable;
- That throws off free cash flow;
- That has a growing and compounding capital value;
- Whose customers just love it;
- Whose employees are passionate about their work;
- Whose owners thrive in and are fulfilled by their business;
- That finds continuing opportunities for growth and innovation; and
- Which delivers greater customer value day after day.

There are 8 rules to growing a great business:

1 Understand intimately your customers' needs

This means really connecting with why customers use your product, the benefits they receive and why they buy from you. The goal is to always deliver greater value than your customers ever expect and always more than your competitors ever could.

2 Think and act strategically

You must first begin to think strategically, understand what it takes to deliver real sustainable growth and understand what is required to be truly competitive. In order to think and act strategically you must be able to step away and understand the implications of change and opportunities that exist in your market.

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Women in construction

Matthew Pringle
Partner, Transaction Services
Melbourne

The building and construction industry including architects, engineers, designers, interior designers, trades people and project managers is Australia's sixth largest employer. In Victoria there are approximately 180,000 full time and 32,500 part time workers and the industry is forecast to grow by 30% over the next five years.

Despite the many opportunities in the industry, women's participation rates remain low. Studies over the years have shown that the high proportion of males in the industry is a deterrent to women who fear discrimination and harassment should they choose building and construction as a career. This perception is unfortunate for women, the industry, and the community as a whole as women have a lot to offer.

One woman who believes being female has actually worked to her advantage in the industry is Venise Reilly, Director of Visioneer Builders. Venise has built a thriving and successful company in a male dominated industry (second most male dominated industry after mining) and relished the challenges thrown at her along the way.

A secondary teacher by profession, Venise entered the building and construction industry by default. In late 2000, she assumed the role of project manager for a townhouse development on a block of land owned jointly with her husband. As a working parent Venise was adept at juggling and multitasking and the project management role seemed a natural segue into the industry. Much to her surprise, her townhouse development won runner up in the medium density category at the 2000 Housing Industry Association Awards, and resulted in an offer of work from a small high end construction company.

Over the next seven years, Venise honed her skills on a range of small projects. She found having been a client herself, gave her the empathy and the ability needed to understand what was important to her clients. She realised that it was all about

"aligning expectations" and that analysing problems and communicating with both the trades and clients required good communication skills and the ability to come up with a solution that was mutually beneficial to all parties. The attention to detail, an asset many women naturally possess was also helpful as building is very detail oriented. As she developed confidence and asked more questions, the trades she dealt with realised they couldn't second guess her and that it was much more efficient to do it right the first time.

In 2007, Venise obtained both her Domestic Unlimited and Commercial Limited Building Licences, allowing her to be involved in both



From left to right:
Michael Schuurmans Director, Visioneer Builders,
John Collie Viridian, Sponsor HIA Awards, and
Venise Reilly Director, Visioneer Builders.

domestic and commercial projects. During this time Venise networked and developed many friendships and contacts in the industry, all of which were useful when in late 2007 she decided to go out on her own. After putting together a business plan for a high end, largely residential building company, Venise set up Visioneer Builders, and in early 2008, invited former colleague and friend Michael Schuurmans to join the company as her business partner. By July 2008, the company already had three building projects on their books.

As part of her business plan for the company, Venise set herself some personal as well as business and financial goals. She was

Key points

- Diversity in the workplace is important.
- Radical career changes are possible at any age.
- Follow your passion and don't be discouraged by perceptions of others.
- Aim for best practice.
- Giving back to your industry is rewarding and worthwhile.

determined to extend herself professionally and make a contribution to the industry. She joined the Housing Industry Association in 2000, and since that time has held a number of positions with the association, whose role it is to support the industry and encourage "best practice". Venise also now sits on the Architects Registration Board of Victoria and has found her association with both bodies to be a really worthwhile and rewarding experience.

Venise's advice to women interested in the building and construction industry is to play to their strengths and give it a go. Women naturally have the attributes that are helpful in project management, she believes – they are collaborative, they are instinctively good at building and maintaining relationships, they demonstrate empathy and compassion for their clients and they are often detail oriented. All these natural skills are advantageous in an industry that has an entrenched male culture and traditional attitudes. "If you can hold your ground, but remain true to your own values and don't let your pride get in the way, you stand a good chance of succeeding in the industry", says Venise.

Visioneer Builders has been operating now for five years. In that time the company has had some significant opportunities and has won numerous awards from the Housing Industry Association of Victoria, including the 2012 Victorian Home of the Year. The company will compete in the 2013 Housing Industry Association's Australian Housing Awards to be held in Brisbane in May.

Pitcher Partners is proud to be associated with both Visioneer Builders and with Venise Reilly who is a great role model for all women in the building and construction industry.