

Meet the boss: Carman's founder Carolyn Creswell

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Published: August 29, 2016 - 12:00AM

If there's one story that shows Carolyn Creswell has stood out from the crowd for decades, it's the tale of what happened when her employer at a homemade muesli company came to the then 18-year-old part-timer to say the company was closing down. "I offered \$1000 to buy the business. They didn't get any other offers, so Carman's was born," she says.

That was over two decades ago. Today, Carman's Fine Foods stocks its products (muesli, protein bars and the like) in 3000 outlets in Australia, exports to 32 countries, and has a presence on the menus of numerous airlines.

While she didn't employ anyone for the first decade of the business (discounting a business partner Creswell bought out two years in), the former Telstra Business Woman of the Year now employs a staff of 25 in head office, where she aims to lead by example about how work and life should be balanced.

"You come to work and you work hard. You have good technology and get stuff done. You don't go to too many meetings or have people in your way so that you can achieve in your role; then, you get the bloody hell out of here. You go home and don't have to worry about work or sending emails: you can switch off. [It helps you] connect with your family and love your workplace," she says.

It's a way of life Creswell has come to partly from having four children while building a successful business; from her interest in reading management articles; and from her commitment to being 'Queen of the graceful no'.

"We all have the same number of hours in the day. It's about choosing how you spend them," she says.

This means often saying no to events ("Just because you're asked, it doesn't mean you have to attend"); prioritising extras ("I don't do book endorsements because I'd want to read the book first, and I prefer only to read things I want to in my spare time"); and finding ways to pass on her business expertise to the next generation without causing havoc in her own schedule.

"People ask me for coffee all the time," she says. Typically, she says no – once she's in the office, meetings are minimised and off-site activities are rationed.

"But I travel half an hour to work morning and night, and I'm more than happy to chat then. Most days I use that time to mentor people over a phone call instead," she says.

Creswell may have steered Carman's towards business success, but it's her approach to improvement that will likely see it stay there: "I'm always asking 'What 1 per cent can we improve today?' There's always something you can find."

CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Carolyn Creswell.

Current position: Founder and CEO of Carman's Fine Foods.

Responsibilities: The strategic direction of the business: all senior management report to Creswell.

Education: Bachelor of Arts, Monash University.

Additional training/courses: Innovation short course, Harvard University; Intensive Negotiation Skills, Clayton Utz; Australian Institute of Company Directors course.

Honourable mentions: Telstra Australian Business Woman of the Year, 2012; Ernst & Young, Young Entrepreneur of the Year, 2007.

Strength: I'm a good listener. If you listen, you can put your experience where it's needed.

Weakness: We do free strength testing (using www.viacharacter.org) and my No.1 strength is 'zest'. I overuse it. I get excited by the new shiny thing and get distracted; I have to sometimes catch myself.

Management style and tips: I'm not a micro manager. I don't get involved in every email or every meeting: I'm driving the bus, which means setting the strategy for Carman's and ensuring everyone understands with crystal clarity where we are going, then letting everyone work towards that.

Work motto: How can we be better?

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace-relations/meet-the-boss-carmans-founder-carolyn-creswell-20160827-gr2eom.html>