

Member news

Dealing with generational difference

Lynda Redfern takes professional development and business flexibility seriously, so when she won Master Plumbers' competition to attend the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Next Gen event she jumped at the opportunity.

Lynda, General Manager of Laser Plumber in Croydon, Victoria, says she and her husband, company director Tony, are the typical baby-boomer, small business owners.

"He is the tradesman who came into the business and I am the wife who had her own career and was doing much of the business operations at night. I knew things had to change and so I came into the business full time."

That change was one in a raft of changes that Lynda and Tony have made during their 28-year business partnership. But, Lynda says, the more dramatic changes have come as each new generation of worker has come through the door.

This is precisely what Next Gen was dealing with. For the first time in history businesses now have five different generations in the workforce. With the drivers for Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Baby Boomers and Traditionalists, Next Gen looked at how we can all work together in the rapidly changing business environment.

Global experts including Netflix's culture architect Patty McCord, Atlassian work futurist Dom Price, and business transformation expert Tom Goodwin spoke to the Victorian crowd recently about this growing issue.

"On my table, I was the only one from a small business," Lynda

reveals. "Most of the questions came from corporates."

Lynda decided to take the opportunity to see if these global greats could impart advice that would pertain to her business.

She asked Patty McCord what it takes to operate a small family business.

Patty answered: "I think you can operate a family business really straightforwardly and honestly. I think it is wonderful to give those opportunities to your children. I think what you are doing is really meaningful. I wish you could hire 10 more plumbers so people could learn that important craft. The best advice I can give is to be honest and straightforward about what it is going to take the next generations to succeed."

She also found the words from Tim Goodwin rang true. He said, the greatest threat to incumbent businesses isn't knowing too little it's about knowing too much about the old way of doing things. "This is so relevant to small businesses who have been around for a long time and doing things the same way for so many years."

Lynda and Tony have had their three children – Brendan, 26, Daniel, 23 and Christopher, 20 – join the business, so they have had to remain flexible and alert to changing needs.

"We are fortunate that we have brought our sons into the business.



Lynda Redfern, General Manager of Laser Plumber in Croydon, Victoria.

The way they do things and their drivers are so different to ours. We have really had to look at things differently in the past 10 or so years.

"To succeed and make money, we just have to keep prodding ourselves and asking, 'is this the right way?'. We have to keep learning and developing, and be flexible to the new ideas coming through."

Lynda says even though it is terribly difficult, small business operators have to prioritise professional development.

"Next Gen was held the day before we process monthly claims. It was hard to do (taking the time out of the business) because there are never enough feet on the ground, but it is about planning and committing to it."