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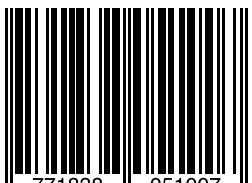
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The luxury hybrid revealed

# building a better business

To describe Debbie Crowther as “dynamic” is to reduce this intense and incredible woman to the ranks of mere mortals, and she is anything but!

STORY BY JENI BONE

Debbie has the zeal of the motivator and the patience of the pedagogue, combined with the credentials of the upper echelon Accountant she was until striking out in to business development and training through her own venture, Stratacore. Herself challenged by a high school maths teacher to think beyond a trade and aspire to university qualifications and the myriad doors that could open up as a result, Debbie is an advocate of and testament to the benefits of continual education. “That was the start of my recognition of the vital importance of teachers to growing potential,” she says, having lost none of her school girl enthusiasm for the power of knowledge.

Debbie is unique in a marketplace of “experts offering upskilling”. Firstly, her professional accounting credentials and accolades single her out as a high achiever, in every sense of the word. At just 21, Debbie was given the reins by Paul Wenham, Managing Partner of Nelson Wheeler Sydney, which at the time consisted of 23 male partners (now BDO), and was sent to the Gold Coast to establish its local operations, charged with targeting the growing Japanese presence. Debbie was unfazed, even though she was only four years into a six year part-time accounting degree. “I knew instinctually the Japanese were going to become major players in the Australian economy, particularly on the Coast – but I never dreamt that I would be dealing with the presidents of major companies, including a Japanese Bank, and within few years of establishing the Gold Coast branch have clients with more than \$1 billion in assets at that time – by today’s reckoning, around \$3 billion.” At 25 Debbie became the first female partner of Nelson Wheeler Chartered

Accountants nationally and by age 26, she had obtained additional qualifications of Registered Auditor, Registered Tax Agent, Qualified Trainer, and subsequently was short-listed as Australian Young Accountant of the Year.

“My passion is to help people and I love to make a difference, and I guess I see things differently to most people. I have no fear to challenge the status quo and think outside the square, even if I’m venturing in areas I’ve never been before.”

Dr Gordon Prestoungrange, Baron of Prestoungrange and CEO of Burke’s Peerage flew Debbie to the UK 3 times in one year to undertake strategic planning for his international operations and comments “I would without hesitation

keeping businesses on track. A lot of business operators are smart – Stratacore is about making them smarter.”

Debbie does not single-handedly handle this gargantuan task. “I firmly believe in a collaborative approach. No one person knows everything. No one can call themselves an expert in accounting, marketing, HR management, strategy development and a variety of other fields. And as accountants are subject to ethical standards, it is normal for us as a profession to bring in the other experts as necessary, rather than doing everything ourselves.

“The way I view Stratacore is as a collaborative vehicle with numerous stakeholders working together to achieve that goal. But I demonstrate that experts need to work with a business in the

**“Stratacore was established to address these issues; education, collaboration, implementation in the right order, keeping businesses on track.”**

commend Debbie as a workplace colleague and as an ambassador for any organisation. Her judgement and advice are shrewd and her mastery not just of the financial facts of a situation but of their potential, and wider still for the organisation at large – are remarkable.” “I’m incredibly passionate about improving the performance of business and that is the mission of both Stratacore and me personally. I cannot believe that so many businesses are underperforming and that the failure rates are so horrific. Unfortunately people don’t know what they don’t know and they don’t know where to get all of the answers. When people do try to fix their business, it’s generally with a haphazard approach.” “Stratacore was established to address these issues; education, collaboration, implementation in the right order,

right order. For example to undertake significant marketing activities before the structure of a business is right or strategy is in place is crazy.”

Stratacore evolved from a need, and Debbie was literally thrust in to the fray. She recounts: “When unemployment figures had massively increased in 1997, the federal government set up localised taskforces under the ‘Jobwatch’ banner to identify contributing factors and address the issue. I was asked to join. The taskforce found that the majority of employers were small business, thus, their performance was crucial to improving Australia’s economy. I was then the principal in writing a program designed to encourage their growth, which became the base of the Stratacore program.”

In 2007, Debbie received \$325,400



AusIndustry grant (Federal Government). “That marked the birth of the ‘Maximise Your Business Growth, Maximise Your Business Value’ program, which targeted small business owners,” she explains. “The training days provided education delivered by numerous experts on a variety of topics and Stratacore delivered one-on-one assistance to help implement the required actions to improve the

resulted in accountants being stuck in compliance mode with limited time available for other services. “The Stratacore Business Growth program was designed to provide accountants with a structured, cost effective, easily implemented program to help their clients grow. I had sat in their shoes for many years, so was very aware of the issues they faced.” It is

## “It’s simple really: kick apathy out the door, invest in quality knowledge for your business and realise the potential.”

participants’ businesses.” From initial feedback, it was evident the program worked. “We had businesses from sole traders to companies with millions in turnover attend with very diverse needs – from those commercialising inventions, to those concerned with exit strategies, retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers and everything in between.” The next step was how to take this concept national. “We knew we needed to bring in more to help, the obvious answer was the accounting profession. In my opinion Accountants should play the pivotal role in helping their clients maximise the value and growth of the business however, in the years since I started in Accounting, unlimited new taxation and corporate legislation have been imposed on business. That has

little wonder Peter Campbell of BCP Group Services refers to Debbie as a ‘groundbreaker’ in the profession. Since launching in 2009, and now with licensees from Bundaberg to Melbourne, Stratacore has been regularly involved with the ICAA and CPA, as well as major corporates and government bodies. “We’ve certainly hit a cord,” Debbie asserts, adding that popular topics include the “25 Traits of a Successful Business” and “The Future of the Accounting Profession”. Today, the company includes the Stratacore Business Academy and the Stratacore Business Growth program to license accountants to access other IP including a Business Health Check report for clients. Debbie tells of a well-established Sydney manufacturing business that was initially

reluctant to undertake a business health check but after being repeatedly pushed by their accountant, BCP Group Services they finally agreed and met with Debbie and their accountant. Instantly issues were identified with ownership of the IP from their new, professionally produced marketing campaign plus numerous other issues covering many areas of the business were uncovered. The impact was so powerful, the CEO and 2nd in charge flew to the Gold Coast the next week with their accountants to attend IP training and later, with their accountants assistance, received a Government grant to help fund the implementation of changes required. “This is a very good long term clients with 20 staff and making good profits”, says Rob Burns, CEO of BCP. “The Stratacore program has impact and we recommend people embrace and more importantly implement the action points it will surely identify. “It’s simple really: kick apathy out the door, invest in quality knowledge for your business and realise the potential. Stratacore provides our accounting team a very practical tool to assist clients beyond mere compliance and transactional advice. It demonstrates clearly we care about our clients and have a desire to ensure they are fit to operate and take advantage of opportunity.” The Stratacore Business Academy provides education to business owners, management, accountants and other professionals through training programs presented by experts in their respective industry fields. “The current program can be likened to completing your masters in two days and then the smart participants will link with a Stratacore licensee (Licensed accounting firm) to ensure all of the learning becomes action with the accountant helping to address the issues required for each client.” The Stratacore Business Academy is mobile, able to be implemented as a joint program with organisations to help their members or clients improve the performance of their business or improve their management skills. “Business is incredibly hard and every industry is facing change and education and implementation is the key to achieving success,” she says. “My passion is to help people achieve at their optimal level, and that’s what

drives me,” adds Debbie. “When a client achieves something and I know we have helped them get there it is incredibly rewarding.” Testimonials flood in, unsolicited, from industry, accountants, business owners and senior staff. Graham Slip, head of BlueChip Wealth Management attended a recent training program and states: “My wish is that every one of my business clients does the course (and particularly their accountants!) My clients would have more wealth for my business to manage! Every module creates the most important ‘to do’ list you could have for your business. This course is particularly relevant in today’s business paradigm, with key understands of intellectual property, web marketing, succession planning and strategies.” Ultons Group, Chartered Accountants, Business Advisors and Financial Planners who employ over 80 professionals in the Bundaberg region refer to the Stratacore Program as “the missing link” they need for their clients. Aaron Lavell FCA is Partner at WMS Solutions, one of the first firms to join the Stratacore program. Aaron recalls: “Like most accounting firms, we had struggled to provide a cost effective value add for our SME clients in relation to their holistic needs outside the raw numbers. Each client’s issues had been dealt with on a case by case basis with no real structure to our processes. The Stratacore program is a very efficient way of ‘throwing multiple hooks in the water’ to see where a client’s needs and interests lie. The trick for the accounting advisor is then to run with the issues and establish a win/win situation with the client. That is, the client improves their business operations and our staff gain greater job satisfaction assisting clients grow their business.” Like most people exposed to the rapier-

mind of Debbie, Aaron can attest to her “tremendous passion and drive” and admits that they were major competitors when Debbie was in Accounting. There are no ‘snooze periods’ during the course, and the quality of the speakers is really high”. “Having an extensive background in professional practice enables Debbie to truly relate to the advisors within the network. She is not just a slick marketer who spruiks a series of motherhood statements. Her business model is all about being another resource for accountants to call upon and there is no risk of her interfering in your client relationships.” From the construction industry, Jody McMullen General Manager, Taf Group Construction Pty Ltd, attended the Stratacore Business Academy Seminar in Sydney. She states that as an accountant with a public practice background, she had thought she understood the fundamentals of business and had the skill set to manage a medium sized company within the construction industry. “However, after attending the Stratacore seminar, I learnt that there were vital aspects of our business that I hadn’t considered, but were essential to the success of the business. “I now view our business from a new perspective and have begun implementing strategies developed using the knowledge gained. I believe we are now armed with the knowledge to prepare for the future and work towards ensuring growth rather than reacting to today’s market, in essence, working proactively. “The seminar has given me confidence in areas where I would not dare to go, such as Marketing and Intellectual Property. The information the presenters provided have allowed us to make decisions about how to identify our needs and how to attract our market audience.”

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As Jody points out, it is easy for businesses to get caught up in the day-to-day operations and lose track of the big picture. “I believe the Stratacore Business Academy is a necessity for any company wanting to get the best results from their business and I’m incredibly grateful to WMS for introducing me to Stratacore.” The final word belongs to David Ashton-Lewis, former High Court Judge and barrister, and consultant for 13 years to the financial sector (including Professional Investment Services), who has undertaken the Stratacore program and worked with Debbie to rise to the next stage of his professional incarnation, the speaking circuit. “Debbie is smart, both intellectually and practically, and people really benefit from that. Her program is excellent and is aimed at businesses, large and small, to improve their competencies in the running of their enterprise. It covers every facet, from staff efficiency, training, morale and operational skills, to deeper core fundamentals of a business that most people don’t even know exist.” **iy1**

[www.stratacore.com.au](http://www.stratacore.com.au)



## The Business Tamer

A new initiative of Debbie’s, The Business Tamer blog, was recently launched to allow her to address topical business issues and interact with the broader business community. The blog features Debbie’s comments on matters affecting companies globally, analyses of successful businesses and why they work, as well as interviews with leading business identities eager to share their wealth of experience. Find it at: [www.thebusinesstamer.blogspot.com](http://www.thebusinesstamer.blogspot.com)