

Launceston, Tasmania

CROWN HOTEL

Crown Hotel, situated on the edge of Launceston's Central Business District, is very much a working men's hotel. It offers all one would expect from a city hotel with a drive in bottle shop, bars, dining room, lounge and pool room. The warmth of the hotel is not just the open fires, but the open friendliness of the local Indigenous management and staff. Nine of the hotel's ten staff are Indigenous. *Crown Hotel* is operated by Clyde Mansell and his two sons, Brett and Shannon, under a partnership called CBS Enterprises. *Crown Hotel* is one of the few hotels in the city without poker machines - they are keen to develop it as a true family hotel. In addition to its provision of excellent food and drink, *Crown Hotel* has also tried to foster strong links with the local Indigenous and non-Indigenous local community. In so doing, *Crown Hotel* has partnered with a range of sporting and social clubs and sponsors a number of them

The Story So Far . . .

Clyde Mansell was brought up on Flinders Island, but has spent the last thirty years in Launceston. He and his sons were looking to their future and wanted to go into some form of business together. They were motivated by financial return, but also wanted an initiative that could assist the local community, as well as themselves. Although Clyde, Brett and Shannon have worked in a range of capacities from community service to government employment, none of them had any experience in hotel management before taking on this venture.

They took out an Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) loan to buy the hotel's licence. It has been a steep learning curve for all



Clyde (centre) with boys Shannon & Brett

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poker machines as a plus, whereas many prospective hoteliers would probably have seen this as a disincentive. Clyde saw an establishment with no poker machines as a way of providing a return to the old style corner hotel atmosphere. It is their aim to continue to make it a family friendly pub, and they feel they are well on the way to that happening. Clyde attributes much of their success to their Indigenous culture and extended family backgrounds.

After 16 months of operation, they are planning to increase the size of their loan to undertake some key improvements. Although told by consultants that the point-of-sale equipment and systems was fine, that certainly was not the case. The poor functioning of inherited point of sale systems has caused real problems and resulted in the business not being able to reach its full cost saving capacities. The Mansell family are eager to replace old systems and equipment with more appropriate modern versions.



The Crown Hotel

to the hotel systems and equipment. The hotel currently employs ten staff, nine of whom are Indigenous.

Clyde believes there have also been significant positive community impacts. Firstly, the operations of the hotel have shown the local non-Indigenous community that, according to Clyde, 'Indigenous people are not all big

The Impact

The greatest milestone achieved so far, according to Clyde, is still being there, and enjoying the venture as a family unit. Year two of the business is showing growth of 15% and this has enabled the family to plan and implement significant improvements



A happy group dining out

drinkers, talkers and fighters', changing perspectives about Indigenous people. All his Indigenous employees are reliable, skilful and very friendly to all their patrons.

Secondly, numerous local clubs are now partnering with the *Crown Hotel* and using the hotel as a base, including the St Patrick's Football Club, the Northern Bombers Football Club and the local hockey and cricket teams. Although the partnerships are reasonably basic, wherein the club teams are provided with free meeting rooms in a friendly and safe environment and discounted meals after training sessions, the sponsorships vary from team to team, and the bonds they build with the hotel and the teams have proven very significant.

Finally, Clyde has endeavoured to show the Indigenous community that the hotel is a successful venture. To that end, he encourages Elders of the local Indigenous groups to visit the hotel and as with the sporting clubs, freely makes rooms available for them to hold regular Aboriginal Elders meetings there.

Success Factors

The Mansell family is very clear about the factors that have enabled their success so far.

Commitment and Tenacity

Operating a hotel is a time consuming occupation. The doors are open 12 hours a day, (10am – 10pm) and yet there are many nights when the family is still working at 3.00am. The total commitment to the hotel's success by all three men and their wives has been essential.

Excellent Customer Service



The Bar

Staff have been trained and coached to offer quality service and be attentive to customer's needs. Such service has encouraged repeat visits from both groups and individuals. The Mansells are convinced of the vital importance of positive customer service.

Family Business Values and Practices

Ensuring the hotel functions as a happy environment where customers feel they belong, experience value for money and are valued, has been vital to building a stable customer base. Enabling customers to enjoy a meal, drink and chat without the *'flashy lights of a casino'* has reinforced this approach.

Staff Support

Treating staff with dignity and respect has been a fundamental principle of the business. Every employee is valued for their contribution and this has led to a stable and happy workforce.

SUCCESS FACTORS

- Commitment & Tenacity
- Excellent Customer Service
- Family Business Values and Practices
- Staff Support
- Continuous Learning

Continuous Learning

Operating a hotel has been a totally new experience for all the family members. Just dealing with the range of consultants, professionals and suppliers has been a daunting task. Their inexperience has resulted in some errors and at times they have certainly been *'ripped off'*. However, the family has viewed it as a learning experience and have learnt to *'read the fine print'* more closely. All family members are committed to being continuous learners.

Advice to other Indigenous people contemplating the enterprise option

Clyde and his sons have some strong advice for potential entrepreneurs –

'Don't go into the business expecting to make a fortune over-night. You need to temper your expectation for monetary reward with that of social/community reward.'

'Be prepared for costs to continually come in, or run over. It's too easy to underestimate what it's all going to cost you.'

'Scrutinise all the suppliers who you deal with to make sure you're getting value for money. It may not be because you're Indigenous that they can be hard on you, but just because you're new in business, people may try to "put one over you.'

'Finally, be prepared for the amount of work necessary to make a business viable, and the necessary 'hands on involvement' and be as prepared as you can be for all the behind the scenes work. In every business there's a lot of work that you never know is there until you're in charge.'

For Further Information

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