

Adelaide, South Australia

CLASSIC BLACK CHAUFFEURED VEHICLES

Suzanne Russell has created the Adelaide-based company, Classic Black Chauffeured Vehicles, because of her desire to become a business role model within the Indigenous business community. At 45, Suzanne has created the foundation of a fresh new company built around her determination and pragmatic approach to business and success. Having never had direct business experience, Suzanne has embraced the knowledge, resources and input available from those within business, the business development field and the chauffeur industry.



The Story So Far...

In 2001, Suzanne attended an intensive Aboriginal leadership course in Canberra. The course stimulated Suzanne's thinking about Indigenous leadership and in particular, leadership within the business sector. Suzanne was challenged by the reality that so few Indigenous people own their own businesses. Suzanne decided she wanted to start her own business and become a role model to others. The question remained - what business should that be?

The inspiration business came from reflecting back to over her eight years of travel around Australia as a Manager in Aboriginal Education and a staff member of the Department of



Suzanne Russell

Premier and Cabinet in South Australia, and the treatment she received from taxi drivers due to her Aboriginality. Taxi drivers would often demand the fare from her before they would take her to her destination. They

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would tell her everything that was good and bad about Indigenous people and question her about what she, as an Indigenous person, should do to fix it. This patronising, inappropriate and blatantly racist behaviour became the motivation and vision for her to make her mark in the chauffeur industry. Her business idea was derived from emotional and personal commitment.

Suzanne has developed a business in a field for which she experiences true passion -she loves driving and meeting new people. The name *Classic Black Chauffeured Vehicles* is a reflection on her as a 'classic black woman' and the elegance and class of her company.

Suzanne's approach to business and its development is pragmatic – she spent her first six months 'gathering intelligence'. She literally rang every chauffer car company in South Australia and shared her interest in starting her own business. She asked each person the same four questions-

- 1) What information could they tell her about the industry?
- 2) What is good about the industry?
- 3) What is bad about the industry?
- 4) What piece of advice would they give someone starting within the industry?

Surprisingly, most people were happy to give information - especially regarding what they considered was needed within the industry. Suzanne meticulously documented, graphed and analysed the data she compiled. Suzanne learned that the supply of stretched limousines was above capacity, but that there was a need for chauffeured sedans – subsequently, chauffeured sedans would be the business focus.

Following the fact-finding period, Suzanne researched the legalities, the taxation requirements and other business establishment factors. She was persistent and systematic in her approach, listening to all advice and following through with every suggestion. Suzanne deduced eventually that her business concept was viable and achievable.

From mid 2000, Suzanne spent the next 12 months establishing administration processes, designing her website, creating business cards and getting her name out to the public. Her web site and business cards have become an important part of her image - the design was a long and considered process. Initially her designs were distinctive reflections of herself- Indigenous images and images of Australia. However, Suzanne soon realised that the business images should be reflective of the cars themselves. Now sleek, stylish images are the feature of her business logo and web site.

The Impact

Within an 18 month period, Suzanne has created a viable and highly visible business within Adelaide, providing both financial rewards and a sense of achievement. Suzanne Russell and her 'deadly' black vehicles have been building their reputation within Adelaide. Her next development goal is to increase the fleet of vehicles and hire additional staff. As a part of her vision and business plan, Suzanne has committed herself to providing meaningful employment and training opportunities to Indigenous people as the business expands.



Suzanne and her 'deadly' black vehicle

Finally, Suzanne can feel incredibly proud of the role model influence she now provides for other Indigenous people in business, especially Indigenous women. Although having been in business a short time, her passion and approach to business is not going unnoticed. Roger Green from the Enterprise Development Centre in South Australia states - *'Suzanne is a business person I admire. She is so focussed, so passionate, and proud of her Aboriginal heritage, she doesn't let the daily trials and challenges get her down. Suzanne is working with me to develop a series of new marketing strategies and a business plan for the next three years. Suzanne is an outstanding example of what an Aboriginal business woman can achieve.'*

The Success Factors

Suzanne clearly outlines the key factors behind her business achievement, namely –

Commitment and Determination

For Suzanne, this commitment and determination means that even when you as an individual, or your business reaches an impasse or a point of difficulty - '*You still have a go – remain persistent – follow each task to the end.*'

Business Planning

A business plan has been essential for Suzanne's success. The purpose of a business plan is to have a clear direction where the business is going. It has enabled Suzanne to stay focused on the direction in which she wants the business to evolve.

SUCCESS FACTORS

- Commitment and Determination
- Business Planning
- Keep Moving Forward
- Outside Advice
- Life Balance
- Quality Product and Service

Keep Moving Forward

Although the business has difficult moments and the number of jobs can seem overwhelming, Suzanne believes - '*the more you do, the more you do, the more capacity you find within yourself.*' Instead of centring on what needs to be done, Suzanne draws comfort by focusing on what she has already done and focusing on the small steps needed to complete each task. Suzanne summarises her approach with the old adage - '*To eat an elephant you have to take one bite at a time.*' Maintaining momentum is essential to Suzanne.

Outside Advice

Suzanne strongly believes in the importance of taking advice. Suzanne has been methodical in seeking assistance in all stages of her business development, from establishment to future planning.

In particular, the support of Roger Green from the Enterprise Development Centre in South Australia has been critical in helping shape the business. In the initial stages, Suzanne was meeting with Roger on a fortnightly basis to develop the plan. In Roger's words - *'The secret to what Suzanne is achieving is her commitment to her business planning. Suzanne prepares plans and researches everything that goes in to the plan's development - Suzanne has ownership over the business plan and the business successes.'*

Finally, being an active member of the Chauffeured Vehicle Association has proved invaluable as a source of knowledge and sharing. Connecting with an industry organisation has allowed Suzanne to network, seek professional advice and keep at the forefront of the high standards the industry aims for.

Life Balance

Being a small business owner, a wife and a mother means fulfilling many capacities. Balancing roles can be stressful and demanding – however this balance is important. Her husband, Ian, has been an important business associate - sharing roles, offering advice and providing support. Suzanne and Ian have reached a balance of alternating shift and family duties to allow for busy periods and the irregular hours of the industry.



Quality Product and Service

For Suzanne, this particularly relates to her image and the brand she has created around herself – her website and business cards are important tools in attaining patronage – it is vital to Suzanne that these tools are

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professional, well presented and a reflection of the business persona. Suzanne states clearly – *‘It is our proud business philosophy to go that ‘extra mile’.* Her stated code of service ethics captures her service standards –

- *Our drivers are highly qualified and professionally attired*
- *Our luxury vehicles are constantly maintained, detailed and immaculately presented*
- *We are fully insured for passenger travel including Public Liability and industry insurance*
- *A user-friendly pre-paid booking service with clear conditions for deposits and payments is provided*
- *We do not double book - so you are not kept waiting’.* (Russell, S, 2004)

Advice for other Indigenous people contemplating the enterprise option

Suzanne Russell’s words of advice are simple -

‘You can do it, you can always make money out of something you love, because you will always love your job. Some people live to work, others work to live. Get out there and do it, do something you love - above all, do what you love and not what your mother wants you to do!’

For Further Information

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