

Innisfail, Queensland

KEVIN WONE ACCOUNTING

Kevin Wone Accounting is a dynamic and proactive accounting practice that services clients across the remote areas of Northern Australia with traditional financial advice, along with business development assistance and support. Kevin has built a very successful professional business through networking and referral and through a positive and opportunistic paradigm. Kevin is using his business and expertise to help other Indigenous people seize opportunities and turn good ideas into successful

The Story So Far . . .

‘When I was at high school, I would never have believed that I would be in business now...’ Kevin was raised in the rural town of Innisfail and spent his weekends and after school, working on the family banana farm, with the occasional break to play his much loved football. Initial career plans to study law at University were abandoned and a football injury saw Kevin laid up for five months, during which time he rethought his future and became involved in the coordination of training programs for Indigenous students. These experiences lead to Kevin’s own enrolment in and completion of a Diploma of Teaching.



Kevin Wone

However, Kevin felt he was not suited to the classroom and moved into a job encouraging Indigenous young people in remote areas to continue their schooling by completing years 11 and 12 outside their community and continuing with tertiary studies. Kevin is very proud of the fact that several of these students have gone on to become respected doctors and teachers. In this position, Kevin travelled extensively and established contacts and relationships with Indigenous groups and government departments across the country.

In 1989, Kevin won a scholarship to undertake a Bachelor of Business (Accounting) at Southern Queensland University in Toowoomba. On graduation in 1993, he was employed as an auditor working with Indigenous communities and then in 1995 took the entrepreneurial step of establishing his own accounting practice – working from home.

In 1999, using his family home as equity, Kevin took out an overdraft and set up in an office in Edmonton (a southern suburb of Cairns).

Kevin now has four staff members, all Indigenous, working out of his Cairns office and a remote office in Mount Isa. The business services clients from Cape York and the Gulf of Carpentaria through Western Queensland and across the Northern Territory. *Kevin Wone Accounting* is moving beyond the traditional book keeping and taxation roles of an accountant to a 'whole of business service', taking his clients from an opportunity and business idea to operating a successful business. To do this, Kevin provides both professional advice and assists with the sourcing of capital.

The Impact

Kevin Wone Accounting is a successful and growing enterprise, employing others. However, according to Kevin the greatest impact of *Kevin Wone Accounting* is the effect it is having on other Indigenous businesses. Kevin encourages and actively supports Indigenous communities and individuals to pursue a future in business. He encourages them to be entrepreneurial '*not just take what someone else is giving, but to capitalise on their resources and take charge of their future.*' Some of Kevin's previous clients include a retail store and fuel distributor in Burketown, tourism operators in the remote areas of Cape York Peninsula and individual contractors aiming to source work with local mines.

Kevin is currently working with a Weipa-based earth moving company to facilitate a joint venture with a large Cairns-based contractor to provide services for a multinational mining company on Cape York. In this partnership Kevin is talking with all the stakeholders and bringing them to the table so that the project can have positive outcomes for all.

Building The Future Through Enterprise –

Stories of Successful Enterprises and Entrepreneurs

Kevin is seen by many as a role model for Indigenous business people. He was recently featured in a video produced by the Queensland Government Department of State Development and Innovation to showcase successful Indigenous businesses. Kevin was the only business person from the professional services sector featured. He believes that Indigenous business people need to find mentors and *'work with mentors ON the business'*, a role he is currently performing for many remote Indigenous enterprises.

On the home scene, Kevin is a great supporter of the local community, sponsoring football teams and giving generously to local community groups and charities. Kevin and his wife, Charlotte, have an autistic son who is now a young adult. Kevin recognises the need to be able to provide constructive employment for him and hopes to be able to utilise him in the business.

Kevin has identified a key challenge that he believes needs to be overcome by Indigenous people going into business, namely *'obligatory sharing'*. According to Kevin – *'This is the custom of sharing everything you have with your family. This is an aspect of Indigenous culture that often works counter to entrepreneurialism. Other members of the family don't understand the requirements of a business to have working capital and to build an asset base. They are also unaware of the implications of the legal structure of a company and may not realise that the property of the company is not necessarily the property of the individual.'*

This tradition, according to Kevin, is the greatest barrier to successful Indigenous businesses today and is one he continues to struggle with both personally and on behalf of his clients. If you work hard and earn a car or a nice house, your family expect that they can use it as they wish. In the remote communities, all the profits of a business are often expected to be shared among the members of the community.

Success Factors

Kevin has identified a series of factors that he believes have contributed to the success of his business and enabled the other businesses that he has worked with to achieve their goals.

Creative Passion

Kevin suggests that he is not artistic or creative, but in growing a business he gets a sense of achievement from having created something – *‘I have never been much of a painter or a musician. I didn’t think I had a creative bone in my body, but when I am working with a business, I can see that I am creating something, beginning with the materials and building something new and that’s a really good feeling.’*

A ‘Have A Go’ Attitude

A ‘have a go’ spirit is vital to Kevin – *‘It is important not to let anyone tell you that you can’t do it, just get in and try. When the Burketown store was acquired by its current Indigenous owners, there was a degree of scepticism that they would run the business down - the reverse has been the case, the business has doubled.’* Kevin tells his clients to believe in themselves and ignore the negativity – which is usually from outsiders, not from their own community.

Hard Work

Hard work is a basic ingredient to success. As Kevin says – *‘Hard work doesn’t frighten me. After working weekends and after school on a banana farm, you learn to have a good work ethic. When I started my business I was working incredibly long hours, seven days a week, but I knew that was what I had to do to get ahead, so I focused on it and worked long and hard.’*

SUCCESS FACTORS

- Creative Passion
- A ‘Have A Go’ Attitude
- Hard Work
- Thirst For Knowledge
- Wife’s Support
- Networking Skills

Thirst For Knowledge

‘Study, information and knowledge are very important if there is something that you don’t know - go out and find out,’ according to Kevin Wone. It is important to always be learning and to value knowledge. Kevin uses the internet, which he sees as a great source of information to help keep track of the changing face of business and to find opportunities. *‘It is also important to learn from your experience and the experience of others,’* says Kevin.

Wife’s Support

Charlotte, Kevin’s wife, has been an incredible support for him. In Kevin’s words *‘Charlotte’s always there to bounce ideas off. She always listens and has confidence in me as a business manager – she supports me to do what I need to do, although that means that I am often away from home for extended periods. She has kept the family together and been dedicated to the family often for long periods when I was away. The support of my wife and her having a role in our business, allows me to attempt to balance my personal life and my work life.’*

Networking Skills

Kevin is an exceptional networker who has built and sustained relationships that over the years have built the business. He proudly says – *‘I know a lot of people from my days working with the young people and getting them into training and every time I go somewhere, I call in and say hello, leave my card and the work just comes back to me.’*

As a business manager, Kevin does not advertise his services. All his work is from referral. He suggests that over his life he has built an amazing number of very close friendships. All who know Kevin comment on how very easy he is to talk to, what a great listener he is and how easy he is to relate to. His genuine passion for helping others is evident in all he does, whether it is professional or personal. And as the old adage says – *‘What goes out, comes back.’*

Advice to other Indigenous people contemplating the enterprise option

Kevin's advice to potential small business owners is very simple - its vision planning and hard work. In his own words

'Plan well, get the right advice and be prepared to work your backside off ... don't be frightened of failure - have a go. Business is not about good luck, it is a combination of planning, getting the right advice and hard work.'

Secondly, Kevin believes the lack of role models is a serious issue for Indigenous people. He strongly advocates - *'Seek out mentors and coaches who can work with and walk alongside you - it can make the difference between a successful business and one that flounders.'*

In conclusion, Kevin urges us to - *'Dream the impossible dream and work at it.'*

For Further Information

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