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MEMBER PROFILE

RANA JEWELL, PNA

After spending the years 1983-89 studying and working 80-plus hours a week, Rana Jewell heard the 'burn out' alarm bells ringing. "I started listening to my body and realised I needed to make changes or I would become chronically ill," she says. Over the next 12 months, with the help of a homoeopath, she made some healthy lifestyle adjustments and regained her wellbeing. But at the end of that time she still decided to sell out of the engineering firm where she was co-owner and finance manager, put her studies on hold, and head overseas for a year.

On her return to Australia, she supported herself – not by working in the finance sector, but in a range of casual jobs. These included waitress, massage therapist, public speaker and, above all, scuba diving instructor. Eventually she resumed her Bachelor of Business degree.

In the diving world she operated under the name 'Beneath the surface' which she kept registered even when she returned to work on dry land. So it was ready and waiting when she set up her own accountancy practice – perhaps the most eccentric business name in the industry, but an accurate reflection of how Rana lives and works.

"The name signifies the things the eye doesn't see, but that you intuitively know are there and should be looking for," Rana explains. "It's something you feel, that is right for you, and it's part of being a smart manager."

An obvious example is Rana's late-80s lifestyle change. With the help of alternative health professionals, she hunted beneath the surface to find out why she had started to flounder, "and made a conscious decision not to be that person any longer". It's a strategy she shares with clients, both in relation to their accounting needs and beyond.

"I'm a small business specialist accountant, but my first studies were in sales and marketing," she explains. "I completed my Associate Diploma in Sales and Marketing in 1988, before I started a Bachelor of Business. And while I did major

in accounting, it wasn't tax accounting; I was interested in profit and loss and the cashflow management cycle.

"The bulk of my work is compliance-related, but with a difference. Most people in small business have no idea about non-tax accounting – but understanding cashflow is really important for managing BAS and GST and PAYG instalments and enables a holistic sort of approach to tax management."

Once they have their tax and other financial management under control, Rana encourages clients to address the matter of lifestyle. "Some find they can cut back their hours without losing income, for example, by changing their customer mix," she says. "For those who are really struggling financially, planning a budget is not enough – they need to change attitudes and behaviours."

She has natural talent for tackling such issues with clients which she's enhancing by undertaking a Masters degree in counselling. "I've chosen to do my research thesis on couples, and how they handle conflict caused by financial issues." She is also poised to make two important business decisions of her own: whether to expand her two-person practice (there's already a waiting list) and whether to become more prescriptive about her client mix. "I'm really interested in with-it professional women."

But her bravest decision to date, she says, was to start her own practice at all.

"After resigning from the engineering firm and finishing my accounting degree, I worked for a chartered accountant for three years, then briefly for a practice in the suburbs. The first got my foot in the door, but working in a grey room with no client contact was eventually not me." At the suburban practice, a difference in style between Rana and her employer ended the job after six weeks.

"I was at a real fork in the road. Until then, the Grand Canyon from employed to self-employed seemed too wide a leap for me, but it was either that or back to the city. Someone said to me, 'I'll be your first client', so with one contract worth \$2000 a year, I jumped!



"And it's been fantastic, because it has enabled me to be me, whether I'm at work or at play. In the 1980s, I apparently had two personas, and people were shocked by the discrepancy between the two. Now I'm doing a job where I use all my skills and talents according to my own ethics, values and style.

"I wasn't quite game in the beginning, but I'm now quite comfortable being me. I'm a flamboyant dresser, for example: at a tax seminar last year, someone said how nice it was to see someone wearing bright pink 'in this sea of grey'. And as a member of the NIA's Queensland Divisional Council, I'm happy to continue developing my reputation as a person who asks questions no-one has asked before.

"I've had clashes with clients who were not on the same wavelength, and if they push me too far, particularly in terms of ethics and values, I do sack them. I'm in a position to be able to do that because I have very little debt. I've always been a good saver, and saving is something I encourage clients to do.

"Liquidity has been given an undeserved bad press over the past decades, in my view. The fact is that it allows you the luxury of

choice. In my case, it has enabled me to become who I really am, and to enjoy being rewarded for it."

Photo of Rana Jewell by Robert Rough.