

## **VCAL PD: TOP TEN QUESTIONS Mentor: Fred Womersley**

It was 1946 when Jack Womersley bought interests in a local Frankston timber mill established in 1922. In 1959, Jack became one of eight founding members of Mitre 10, before handing the reins to sons Geoff and Fred. The business is now being run by Jack's grandson's Stuart, Peter and Scott Womersley. The Family purchased Sorrento Timber and Hardware in 2004 and the Chelsea Heights Mitre 10 store in 2007. Today, Womersley's Mitre 10 continues the tradition of service excellence which began 90 years ago.

*Fred is a successful businessman, sportsperson, loving husband and father with a great sense of community and giving back.*

**Thank you for the opportunity to contribute. A couple of other phrases I have learnt:**

**1 From a headmaster:** "students you are a long time working so make sure you choose a job you enjoy."

**2 From a speaker:** "The only time wealth comes before work is in the dictionary."

**3** "It is nice to be important but more important to be nice."

**Best regards Fred**

**Outcome One - Planning and Organization.**

**1- How is organization linked to success in your life?**

I have always had a clear plan as to what I wanted to achieve both in business, personal and sport

Therefore I have had to be organised to enable me to succeed and avoid chaos.

It has been said that if you do not know where you are going how will you know when you get there?

However you have to be prepared to change your organisation plan when circumstances arise

**2- How do you keep yourself organized on a day to day basis?**

These days I am basically retired so I just use an old fashioned calendar kept next to the phone.

When working I used a hand written diary and monthly planner on my desk where I could see the big picture/

I also have a very good memory

## **Outcome Two - Problem Solving.**

### **1- Can you give an example of when you tried to solve a problem and it created a bigger problem?**

The biggest issue in our business is staffing and whilst we have been pretty good at it we occasionally get it wrong. There was an instance where we were looking for a department manager as the person in the current position was not up to it and had to be downscaled.

We employed a person who had worked for us 10 years previous and had been very good but we were not aware he had suffered a health problem in meantime and was very erratic in his behaviour and upset all the other staff. Unfortunately we had to move him on and eat humble pie.

### **2- What has been the hardest decision you have had to make throughout your career?**

Without any doubt was in 1994 when I had to close our family business at the site in Playne Street, Frankston which had been operating since 1946

The business had become unviable due to lack of parking, changes to the town and changes in shopping habits. We had another very successful store operating out of town with lots of parking and we were able to place the staff at our new site other than 3 who wished to take a package and retire.

I think we have been very fortunate not to have retrench staff over the years ,even when Bunnings came we were able to reduce overtime and not put people off as personally I would have found this very difficult.

## **Outcome Three - Knowledge and Skills.**

### **1- Did you have an idea of what to expect before starting your career?**

Yes I had worked as a teenager in the family Timber and Hardware business so I had a pretty good idea as to what happens.

After finishing my Matric, now VCE I went to work in an Accountants office and studied at night

After finishing my degree I decided I wanted to return to the family business starting at the bottom, stacking timber, driving the truck, serving customers.

After a couple of years I took over the accountancy role and ultimately Chief Executive

I should add that there was no school program of Work Experience at this time.

### **2- What is your main interest/hobby outside of work, how does it separate your work like to your personal life?**

When started work I played cricket, squash and some tennis and also coached junior cricket in my early 30s. I retired from cricket and coaching when I was 50.

Today, I play bowls and golf and go to the Gym 3 mornings a week at 7am

In the 1960s shops shut at noon on a Saturday and there was no Sunday trading either.

I have also been a member of the Lions Club for 45 years.

Probably for the first decade of my business life I would bring work home on most nights and do a couple of hours after dinner. WE always tried to have dinner as a family

Later on I worked out that it is better to do your extra work early in the morning when you are fresh and to relax at night

## **Outcome Four - Research and Development.**

### **1- What's the greatest development that has shaped you?**

The obvious answer is calculators, computers the internet and the mobile phone but I will take a different angle.

I was born in 1940 and commenced primary school 1946. I was born a left hander and in those days we wrote in pen and ink therefore a left hander continually smudged his or her writing so we were made to learn right handed.

Also in the early 1940s the biro was invented my Baron Bic and this completely changed the system and allowed left handers to continue writing with their natural hand.

The side benefit of changing me was that I loved playing ball games and I spent hours in the garage hitting a ping pong ball against the wall.

For some reason it just came natural to me to change hands and therefore I was of great annoyance to opponents on the tennis and squash courts who could never find my backhand and could not figure out how a little bloke had such an enormous reach.

### **2- In your opinion, what is the best way to learn?**

Be curious, observe, read, listen. Do not be locked in your ideas as there will most likely there be a better way to do it

Also you were born with 2 ears and 1 mouth so you should listen twice as much as you talk.

## **Outcome Five - Communication**

### **1- What is the best advice you have ever received?**

This is what Calvin Coolidge President of USA 1923 to 1929 had to say, Sir Reginald Ansett had this on his desk as did my father Jack who founded our business and was one of the founders of the Mitre 10 group

Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence

Talent will not

Nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent

Genius will not

Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb

Education will not

The world is full of educated derelicts

Persistence and Determination alone are Omnipotent!

### **2- If there isn't any effective communication in your workplace, how does it affect you and/or your business?**

The workplace must be a team and it is essential that there is communication both ways as it is the only ways employees know what is expected of them and that the management can be aware of problems that staff may be having.

It is also imperative that management can get feedback of any issues that customers might be contributing and also if there is feedback from customers re staff that this is passed on to the staff member and the customer is thanked for their comment.