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Warranwood Equestrian

Sharing the passion for horse-riding

As any equestrian lover will tell you, riding horses is more than just a hobby. It is a way of life, accentuated by the strong connections that one can form with these beautiful animals. For Dannielle Appleford, owner and manager of the Warranwood Equestrian Centre, horse riding has always been a major part of life. Teaching horse

riding is what she has done for most of her professional career. As such, operating her very own centre was always in the cards for Dannielle.

For a long time, Dannielle was simply working as an instructor for a variety of people who were running similar businesses. In fact, prior to focus-



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ing on her own business, she worked for four different people at the same time. On one hand, this allowed her to gain a lot of knowledge, both in regards to horse riding and business management. After all, she witnessed the many challenges and difficulties faced by horse-riding centres first-hand.

AT A GLANCE

WHO: Dannielle Appleford's Warranwood Equestrian Centre

WHAT: A centre for horse-riding lessons which caters to people of all abilities, ages and backgrounds

WHERE: 72-84 Husseys Lane, Warrandyte VIC 3113, Australia

WEBSITE:

warranwoodequestriancentre.com.au

Starting from scratch with a unique skillset

On the other hand, however, this approach was limiting Dannielle's abilities and her motivation. She found that she missed out on a lot of opportunities to influence things in ways she thought best. Her job was to go in and give lessons according to the philosophies and ideals of each businessman, not to apply her own. As one might expect, this soon led to a point where the interests of all the businessmen, and Dannielle's, were starting to conflict with each other. At that point, Dannielle decided to take a leap of faith and start her own business.

As if that was not challenging on its own, Dannielle also decided to start entirely from scratch. Like she informed us, it was not appropriate, not good business ethics, to carry her previous students across to her new business. Instead, she focused

on developing an entirely new business that she could proudly call her own without any help from outside. At first, she simply leased a property so that she could plan ahead for the next few years and make sure that her own equestrian centre would actually be viable. A few years down the line, however, she understood that location was an extremely important part of the business that she could not neglect. Thankfully, she did find a great location reasonably close to the Melbourne CBD as well as freely accessible to everyone in the eastern suburbs. “If you go too far out from the city, you are limiting your clientele”, says Dannielle.

Teaching horse-riding skills to people with disabilities

Aside from having years of experience as a horse-riding instructor within many different businesses, Dannielle also has an extensive skillset which has allowed her to diversify and place Warranwood Equestrian Centre apart from the competition.

“Starting any business is a challenge. It’s very different to start a business than it is to take over an existing one. Building the clientele is a challenge. I teach people with disabilities as well so I found that there’s a lot of demand for that sort of service. I found that this was one of my strengths. I was able to pick up a lot of clients from that niche market as that clientele

was not available to many people who just didn’t have the skillset to do the same. So rather than walking in and taking over an existing business, it’s a lot more challenging to create your own”, says Dannielle.

Aside from working directly with people with disabilities, Dannielle is also involved with various organisations that operate on a similar basis. For instance, there are a number of adult learning centres that access programs through Warranwood Equestrian Centre as well as a school. The centre maintains a strong relationship with the RDA Warrandyte Centre, a not-for-profit organisation that allows people with a variety of disabilities and from many different backgrounds to fulfill their equestrian goals.

Facing the challenges of business ownership

Her advice to aspiring entrepreneurs is to plan everything out very carefully, particularly in regards to financing and budgeting. In addition to that, she is adamant that setting very realistic timeframes is crucial to running a successful business. This philosophy applies to both important events, like opening up the business, and lesser but continuous ones such as positioning new events and sales. The pressure created by not having a realistic timeframe and planning poorly results in a lot of unnecessary stress that can be avoided quite easily. Setting realistic targets and being organ-



Jo-anne Danes | Photography



ised is important for a business too because disappointing people by not meeting their expectations has a negative effect on reputation.

One of the biggest challenges that Dannielle herself had to face was managing her time. Balancing work and life can be difficult even when you are working for someone else but the playing field is much different when you are in business for yourself. Dannielle believes that many people who aspire to own their own business tend to underestimate the time investment and commitment necessary for success. For instance, Dannielle has to work with customer enquiries which means that she must always be available by phone in case someone calls with questions or concerns. Ignoring

such crucial aspects of a business is not possible so sacrifices in her personal life have to be made, to a certain degree.

Up until this point, Dannielle has been the person who has done most of the instruction and training sessions along with managing the business. In order to expand further and attract a larger number of clients, however, she needs to train a couple more people. Because of the unique services that she offers, she needs to find like-minded people who share her beliefs and are also very experienced in the field. Even though that will most likely present a considerable challenge, Warranwood Equestrian Centre will surely benefit from other people like Dannielle.

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