

Beacon Resort, Queenscliff

Lorraine Golightly, Owner/ Manager

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Queenscliff's multi-award winning Beacon Resort is one of Victoria's longest family owned and operated tourism businesses.

The Golightly family built a caravan and camping park in 1970, but during the past four decades it has been steadily extended and upgraded to include luxury cabins, motel units, an indoor swimming complex with therapeutic spa and, most recently, a function/convention facility.



For many years Beacon Resort was operated by its founders, Don and Judy Golightly, daughter Lorraine, son Bruce and their partners. The extensive family involvement required careful role delineation from the earliest of days.

While many family businesses implode after working closely together for several years, the Golightlys recognised the potential from the beginning. They created a system that allowed for combined input on major issues, but permitted every family member their own autonomy and responsibility.

When the children joined the business in 1976, and then joined the company in 1988 when their partners came on the scene, the family recognised that it was important to clearly define roles and responsibilities.

" We established some ground rules from the beginning and these increased as the business grew and became more complex, says director Lorraine Golightly.

"Previously we had more or less pitched-in on everything when things needed to be done, but as the business grew it couldn't continue that way in the long term.

" We broke the roles into: reservations, marketing, accounting, and operations. Even the operations area was broken into sub roles, such as compliance and regulations, construction etc. Even something like picking the paint colour for a room was left to a particular person.

" Family members took on the roles that best suited their interests and expertise. Everyone clearly knew their area of responsibility and, even though sometimes you would think 'I would have done that a bit differently', you knew that it wasn't your area and you didn't interfere, even though opinions were always welcome".

The family met over dinner every two weeks to conduct the overall planning for the business and to bring each other up to date on what each was doing. They also tried to lunch together as much as possible, so they could address minor issues before they developed into something bigger. Each quarter they met formally to discuss forward planning, to measure performance, set projections and to look at changed circumstances that could affect trade.

The allocation of time that each member puts into the business can often be a sticking point in family structures, but the Golightlys developed a system that rewarded each member according to what effort they contributed. For example, as one family member's commitment to his young family increased, he was able to scale-back his involvement. Similarly, as the Golightly parents grew older, they were able to negotiate a scaling-back of their involvement.

" We never wanted a situation where one family member felt that they were putting in a lot more than another and that it was not being recognised financially", says Lorraine.

Since 2005, the business has been reduced in size and is now owned by just Lorraine and her mother. It now relies more heavily on engaging the expertise it needs from outside the family.

However, the workplace flexibility that has always characterised Beacon Resort still remains a feature of the operation.

As part of the annual appraisals, staff from managers to housekeepers are asked how much time they want to commit to their job. Consequently, staff morale is high at Beacon Resort, because staff know that they have the flexibility to match work commitment to their lifestyle and personal needs.

Lorraine says that the pared-down management and staff structure has also resulted in the business engaging contract staff to undertake specialist work. This had added greater expertise and reduced pressure on the payroll.



Key findings:

While acknowledging that every family may operate differently, Lorraine Golightly offers the following advice, based on her years working within a large family owned and operated business:

- *Clearly allocate roles and responsibilities.*
- *Respect other members work and don't drift out of your own area of control and expertise.*
- *Remunerate family members according to the time they want to put into the business.*
- *Allow flexibility to change the business structure if needed because of changed family circumstances.*
- *If at any stage a family member wishes to head in another direction or has different expectations for the business, it's probably best to amicably part ways rather than trying to change each others thinking.*