

Beacon Resort, Queenscliff **Lorraine Golightly, Director**

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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 for 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.

When the inevitable problems arose, father Don was usually acknowledged as the best moderator and he would steer the family through discussion and a thinking process to determine a suitable outcome.

The allocation of time each member puts into a 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 son Bruce’s commitments to his young family increased, he was able to scale back his involvement and was even able to take off some winter seasons to work with his family in the Victorian ski fields. When his wife, Tracey, had the children she was able to work right through her pregnancies from her home office to fit in with the family commitments.

Similarly, as Don and Judy 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 owned by Lorraine and her mother, Judy, but the same principles they used as a broader family unit over 30 years are still applied in the management structure.

As part of every annual appraisal, 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 they have the flexibility to match work commitment to their lifestyle and personal needs.

Existing staff are also given the opportunity to work additional hours, before the owners advertise for any additional staff to fill the gaps .

Management are paid for their lunch breaks, so that they are able to sit down with the owners over a meal to discuss the day to day issues.

Key Lessons

While acknowledging that every family business may be different, Lorraine Golightly offers the following general advice:

- 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.

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