

Take a Break – refresh your business and yourself

Any small business owner will tell you they don't have time to take a holiday, but in doing so they may be doing themselves and the business a disservice.

Like most small businesses, a butcher is often the owner and the face of the business who works easily 12 – 14 hours a day, six days a week. In the short term of setting up a business and getting going, that may be necessary until the business is running smoothly and bringing in enough income to employ staff.

It is important though, according to Anna Cochrane CEO at Meridian Agriculture, to build in mechanisms for the owner/butcher to take time off from the business.

"For many small business owners, we suggest thinking it about in this fashion: what would happen to your business if you or someone in your family was seriously ill and you couldn't work – would your business continue to operate?"

Building into the business a chain of command, operating procedures that everyone knows and a good line of communication between yourself and staff all contribute to the business continuing in this scenario. It builds trust amongst your employees, leadership and responsibility.

A break from the business doesn't mean illness; holidays are an important part of your working life.

There are a number of good reasons why small business owners should give themselves a break.

Holidays are essential for mental health and family relationships. They provide opportunities to have discussions that do not include the business which is refreshing in itself – happy family, happy life



Anna Cochrane of Meridian Agriculture advises that taking a break is a must for the small business owner for his wellbeing.

Being able to take holidays is a measure of business success – your management, training of other staff members to assume responsibilities and the ability to afford a holiday

Having a holiday is an investment in your business as you come back with fresh eyes. You see things more clearly that you may have grown used to that really need to be addressed.

Research has shown that taking a break can actually improve your profitability by as much as 20%

Take the time to learn new skills, attend meetings and trade shows, both local and internationally to bring back fresh ideas, methodologies, technology and techniques.

Self-employed people work long hours – fatigue, stress and exhaustion can

hinder productivity and for butchers working with sharp knives and hazardous equipment, it can become dangerous.

There is never a good time to take a holiday. By communicating with staff, holidays can be planned in advance to ensure everyone gets a break. Set an example to your staff to show that it is okay to take a break.

Your first thought, is 'that's all well and good, but who can I trust to fill my shoes while I'm gone?'

It turns out that there is a growing community of skilled butchers who are more than happy to help in the shop while you are gone either as a secondary butcher or in a more managerial capacity. Depending on how long you are planning to be away



Graeme 'Roaming Butcher' McLaren is a 'locum' butcher armed with his knives, can come in and give a hand when the boss is away or to help with staff numbers during peak periods.

– a week to a couple of months – there are options.

Graeme McLaren is one such butcher.

Enjoying life now that the kids have left home, Graeme and his wife Gailene have hit the road to travel the countryside, picking up short term work wherever they go.

A well-known butcher from the Ulladulla region on the south coast of NSW, Graeme has been in the industry for more than 30 years, working in several butcher shops and supermarkets in the district before taking the plunge to run his own shop.

"In the 30 years of being a butcher, I learned a great deal of skills, gained a lot of experience and met some great mentors in the industry," said Graeme, from somewhere up near Winton, Qld. "I saw different approaches and methods to doing things and spent time running my own business. I have built a reputation for being professional, reliable and good at what I do."

Graeme and Gailene's decision to hit the road came after working the typical long hours of a small business owner – six days a week, 14 hours a day. The couple hadn't had a break for two years and realised now that the kids were independent it allowed them the freedom to come and go as they please and enjoy life.

The couple has been travelling now for more than nine months since selling the shop in Ulladulla and travelled 16,000kms from Elliston in SA to Yarrowonga on the Murray River to Winton, Qld. To look for work, Graeme has set up the 'Roaming Butcher' Facebook page that acts as a blog of his whereabouts and as an online reference. Facebook sites dedicated to butchers often advertise for staff and he keeps tabs on the online conversations.

"If Gailene and I decide we are going to head in a particular direction in a month's time, I put a post on Facebook to say I'm coming and to offer my

services. I also go through the phone book to ring butchers and supermarkets in the area to see if they need anybody. Sometimes it is through word of mouth - someone knows I'm going to be in the area who knows someone needing a butcher. Two or three phone calls later and I've got a job.

"You have to be fairly flexible in your approach; sometimes the job is for a week or two, sometimes three months to help cover a peak season. Having accommodation and a car is vital. My tools of trade are my knives, a tax file number, references, my own Super fund and I have a police check to reassure the employer." (Check with your financial advisor on whether a tax file number or ABN will work best for you)

"If I am coming in for a more managerial position it is usually for more than a week or two as the staff should be able to handle a short absence. It makes it a lot easier for me and the business owner if all the systems are working smoothly and all the staff know what they are doing. Having defined ways of doing things that everybody knows means that it should pretty much run itself – I'm just there then to make some decisions should they come up. Ideally, a handover period of a couple of weeks is the best way to go."

For Graeme and Gailene, it has been a lifestyle choice that they don't see ending too soon and admit it is not for everyone. Graeme said it is a great way to meet people, learn new skills and to share his knowledge of the industry. As a hard-working, small business owner he would readily recommend that utilising an itinerant butcher is invaluable for those who need a reliable person to look after the shop while they take a break. ■