

THE SWITCH

From family firm to ski instructor

For Peter Docherty, the family business has always been an option. "Our company has been producing curtains since the 1930s; it's supported our family for three generations," he says.

Although he initially took a different path, a diagnosis of bipolar disorder meant the flexibility that came with working for family became more appealing.

"I started to be useful wherever I could, managing the paperwork and doing deliveries, [while] managing my illness," he says.

Docherty soon discovered his skills improved the family business.

"I put in different systems to give my parents a much firmer month-to-month knowledge of financial progress," he says. "They'd always had a reputation for quality and have some very famous clients – but hadn't had the time or expertise to put into that side of it."

While family support was his "saving grace" during the worst periods of his illness, when he found the right treatment for him Docherty began to explore old passions again, including skiing.

"I realised that doing something I really love helped with my illness and [that] that's where my life needed to be," he says.

At age 40, Docherty decided to train as a ski instructor. "I'm what's called a back-to-back ski instructor," he says. "I do the Australian season [at Thredbo] and then one overseas; I've just gotten back from Germany, from a resort called Garmisch-Partenkirchen on the southern border with Austria."

He spends nine months a year on the slopes and couldn't be happier.

To train for his new career, Docherty headed to Big White, Canada, where an 11-week course

helped him pass his first-level exams. "It's exhausting," he says.

"I remember falling asleep at the dinner table a couple of times. But you're also having a fantastic time; you're living on the hill but you are working really hard."

Although the physical aspect is easier now his muscles are conditioned, the training never stops. "You are constantly going for the next-level qualification," says Docherty, who is a level 2 instructor.

Ski instructors enjoy a blend of work and play. In New South Wales, most live off the slopes in Jindabyne and car pool up the mountain early to train or ski before work.

"On training days I leave at 6.30am," Docherty says. "When the hill opens I ski and check the mountain for my clients [before] work at 9.30am."

Docherty teaches a series of two-hour classes during the day.

"The biggest responsibility is to make sure clients are safe and having fun," he says.

"That first lesson is really important to put people at ease, keep them motivated and actually teach them something. I consider [it] one of the most important jobs on the hill."

As an older worker in a young person's field, Docherty wasn't sure the age gap would suit him.

"I knew most people would be 20 years younger than me. But age is not a factor and some of the dearest friendships I have are with [far younger] people."

Although he values the friendships it's the job Docherty enjoys most. "I'm not the best skier in the world but I love teaching so much," he says. "It makes your whole life happier."

SUE WHITE



THEN

NOW

SALARY \$60,000

WORK-LIFE BALANCE "There was lots of flexibility. I have my own apartment in the house where my parents live but the workroom is attached to it, too."
HOURS About 40 hours. "It's difficult because it's at home; you're always there."



Cool change ... Peter Docherty worked in the family curtain-making business before becoming a ski instructor.

SALARY \$24.95 an hour (as a level 2 instructor). "You're not making a fortune."

WORK-LIFE BALANCE "Fantastic! I travel the world and have a ball, it's just great. I know hundreds of people and have wonderful friends. Most days are an absolute joy!"

HOURS Six hours a day, six days a week.

MISS "I miss my dogs. I miss my family, too, but I speak to them every day – you can't do that with your dogs."

CHALLENGES "To always remain physically fit. I've never had a job before where physical fitness is a requirement."

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mycareer.com.au/salary-centre.