



Best bar none ... Carman's boss Carolyn Creswell. Photo: Eddie Jim

Healthy recipe for happy employees

Company CARMAN'S

SINCE Carolyn Creswell founded Carman's Fine Foods in 1992 with just \$1000 in her bank account, she has had little choice but to trust others.

"I have four kids under eight, so trusting others is integral to people's positions here," Creswell says.

Creswell built Carman's into a multimillion-dollar business while keeping a tight rein on the company's ethical foundation. Although giving staff freedom started out of necessity, today the approach is more about Creswell's personality.

"Innately I'm a trusting person. If you trust people they generally do the right thing by you."

INITIATIVES

- ❑ Top-up beyond government maternity leave program, to meet employee's regular income.
- ❑ Senior positions return to work in a part-time capacity until eldest child is in primary school.
- ❑ On-site children's room complete with bed, TV, games console and hot desk, so a child's parents can work nearby during school holidays or sick days.
- ❑ Philosophy of avoiding conflict: win-win solutions are preferred.
- ❑ Focus on ensuring food comes from the kitchen, not the chemist – avoiding additives where possible in products.

- ❑ Owner walks the talk on life balance: works four days a week.
- ❑ "POQ" (Piss Off Quick) program every second Friday. Staff receive fortnightly chance to leave early if their inbox is up to date.
- ❑ Company figures accessible to all staff as part of a trusting approach.
- ❑ Staff have free rein in fully stocked office fridge (yes, including wine).
- ❑ Owner sets goals but allows individuals to work out the best steps to reach them.

While Creswell hires based on attitude rather than experience, she's found that passion is what really pays off in her staff. "I hire people with a certain attitude," she says. "Are you someone with a twinkle in your eye, or someone I'd enjoy working with?"

"People with a genuine passion for what they do can always learn; however, you can't change a staff member's personality."

Although giving employees a balance between responsibility and free rein doesn't always pay off – "There was one guy who lied about getting in early, saying he wanted the flexibility to pick his kids up from school" (he was fired) – the result is generally positive.

"Staff members get protective of the company. They work harder and are more committed when they start treating it like it's their own," Creswell says.

SUE WHITE