

Transcription - When To Walk Away

Welcome back, I'm Fulyan Orsborn, she's Kim Baillie and the tables have turned. (And I'm laughing hysterically.) Today, I'm actually going to be interviewing Kim. For me, it's quite exciting because I know all about it and I really believe it's worth sharing. So Kim, welcome as a guest.

Thank you. I'm so pleased to be here.

I know that recently you embarked on a new chapter and initiative in your floral art world and I'm very excited by it. I'd just like to do two things, talk about what got you to start this new journey and then I want to hear all about this new journey. Over to you.

The start or the trigger for this activity was an unpleasant experience. And it is not an unheard of experience in terms of the corporate world. But this, of course, was outside of the corporate, paid corporate world, but still in an organizational structure.

Many of you know that for 10 years, I have been involved in the administration and management of two organizations, the New South Wales Floral Art Association and the Australian Floral Art Association. I've been president of both organizations and most recently, for the last five years, president of the Australian Association. During that time we were allowed, oh, and I will say allowed, because that's very much the case, to think about submitting a bid for hosting of a world show. Our world show is held every three years. Because of COVID, the most recent one, which would have been held this year in 2023, was not held because the organizational planning and management of it couldn't happen during the preceding three years.

The next one was due to be in 2027. We, as the Australian Association, put in the bid, we won the bid. It was not an easy bid to put in, because for six years before that, I had had to fight and had taken lots of rejections about whether we should put the bid in or not. There is an old guard of people, members, not so much in the management side of things anymore, but had been previously, who didn't want this to happen. I guess from a personal perspective, they didn't want it to happen because they knew that they wouldn't be involved, and there was a bit of personal prestige and notoriety and importance attached to being involved from around the world. So we're not just talking Australia, but their standing in the world of floral art, and that they had built up reputations that they didn't want to see ignored, if they were not involved in the management. I had not, at any stage, determined what the management would be, only that I wanted someone from every state to be involved in the planning because it is a big exercise. And this is a big country. We had to decide where we were going to hold it that would be most appropriate, all those sorts of things.

So we get to the point where the membership agrees that we should put in the bid. I put in the bid, we win the bid and the bid process was that you put in the initial bid, that is quite a small bid, on the understanding that if there are more countries involved, then you'll have to put in a full expanded bid with a plan of action for that three years, so that the world membership can vote on who should attend. We were fortunate in that there were two other countries

that were bidding at the same time we did, but they both withdrew their bids at the very last

minute once they found that we were bidding because it not in 40 years had it been held in Australia and everyone wanted to come here. So they withdrew their bids because they had both hosted the world show previously.

So that's 12 months ago and I immediately set out to start to build a groundswell of support as I knew there was still this element of people who were going to be troublemakers all the way through. I put out a newsletter every month, I started the planning, I gathered together representation from each of the states of Australia for a management committee. I had a terms of reference for the management committee, I followed it to the letter with the constitution, and I could feel that there was a groundswell of people who were starting to get very irritated by the fact that I was doing this so smoothly and successfully and getting support from areas where they had not themselves had support previously. One particular person determined that she should be in charge and she worked actively during that time to ensure that at some point she would be able to have the coup. That happened in July of this year at a meeting in Queensland. It wasn't overtly a takeover, but I came away from the meeting thinking there is no point in me spending another four years fighting this group and trying to organize something on the scale of what had to be done. In terms of the scale, we're talking about an event that runs for four days, open to the public, has the potential for about 10,000 visitors a day, 600 competitors from around the world, floral art demonstrations with probably about 200 people per room, four rooms happening twice a day, and a trade show, and a Gala Dinner which was going to be in the Great Hall of Parliament House in Canberra. So massive planning and execution of activities, and I thought that there's too much to concentrate on for me to be fighting this back battle at the same time.

And so I stepped away. I stepped away from everything.

It was interesting to see the reaction, those who understood and had been on the committee with me, and they actually all resigned as well, one by one over the following weeks. Their reaction, as I said, was just one of... well this is what you had to do. You had no choice. Whereas the ones who had been creating the issue were in the, "Oh, we're so shocked. We're stunned. We can't understand it. Why did you do it?" And the basis of that reaction really is that it's not what they would have done. They would have forced themselves to stay just because they wanted the prestige.

So that left me with a huge amount of time. I didn't realise how much time it gave me to do other things.

Before we get onto that... there was a lot in what you said there. You have put a lot of effort into that. And from all the topics that we've been covering in our podcast, I think it's important to note that firstly, nobody will be shocked by what you heard because these things happen in big organisations. People supporting, people not supporting, etc. What I get out of it is the fact that you persevered for a long, long time and made a huge difference. That is a lesson for all of us. There's few of you, minority rather than majority, you're a big part of that. You went through an organisational cultural challenge, which is the hardest.

You say 40 years and then we won the bid as if it's like a small thing. It's massive, absolutely massive, to talk about somebody who never really believed our country to be worthy of competing and sort of playing host, we do compete, but playing host to that. And you manage

to make it happen and win the bid. I think that's fantastic.

Like with a lot of things sometimes, we put everything into the job and the time. So what I'm hearing now, the time, for you, was right to say goodbye, but I want to specifically acknowledge how much you have done and how much you left it in a much, much, much more better state than it was. And whether it doesn't feel like it, you have moved people's minds and hearts.

I appreciate that. And I know, in that sense, I can look back on it and see that I have made a difference, even the detractors will say, well, you dragged us kicking and screaming into the 20th century. And it's interesting because they will say, well, you dragged us kicking and screaming into the 20th century and my reaction is, we're in the 21st century.

All right. So now share with us where you are now.

Many of you know I live in a regional area in New South Wales. And so we have a great little community, but not a community that necessarily does things together. We're sort of proud of the community, but it's a tourist area as well.

And so there's a lot of people who are involved in that sort of things more so than the actual community itself. And so we probably see ourselves, identify the community as the reason that tourists come here rather than the community being the community.

There is a new business in the area that is very different to anything else that's here. We've been involved in the development of their business activities as well. And the opportunity to use the venue that they've got for something a little bit different that is kind of associated in a creative way with what they're doing, was presented to me. I can think back to the time that I made the decision. It's probably the first time in my adult life I can think about making a decision and acting on it straight away. Not analysing it, not giving it 24 hours, not doing the SWOT analysis of it, writing it all down and just thinking about it carefully. I just thought that the venues there, I've always wanted to do this particular activity, so I'll just write to them. I wrote to them, sent an email late on a Monday night.

And within half an hour they had written back and said, yes, we're in, just do it.

And so then it was, oh, okay, well, let's just keep running with the adrenaline that is happening at the moment.

What I set up was a 20 week program, once a week, for people to come in free of charge, to learn the basics of floral design so that they could make something interesting from their gardens or from things that they might have bought at the flower shop on supermarket or wherever. And I have been doing videos every month on using supermarket flowers. So it was a bit of an extension of that as well, but it was in front of people.

I didn't know how I was going to promote it. I didn't know who would come, how many would come, all those sorts of things. So I did the things that I knew about first of all in terms of let's make this very organised, let's make this very planned.

Let's get all of the paperwork done because that's my comfortable, happy spot.

And then we'll see how it works after that. So I gave myself 10 days before the first session.

We have a very good local member of parliament who puts out a newsletter every week via email, so I sent the information to him, sent the information to the local paper, put it out on

social media as well. And the first week I had two people turn up and I wasn't particularly concerned because by then I decided that this was a process that I was going to go through and I had to just work the process.

I thought about 20 different things that I could make so that people, if they only came one week, would go away with a skill, a technique that they had learnt and something physical in their hands that they could show people that they learnt, not using too many flowers so it was things from their garden and just passing all the information about there is beauty in just a stick sometimes and just a leaf. Encourage them to look around a bit more but also the opportunity for the business that was giving me this place to do it free of charge, that there would be some return for them as well. There is a cafe there and what has happened since that time, so we've been going 10 weeks, the people now that are coming and I will say the numbers have doubled every week since then because word has spread about it, they buy their coffee beforehand, before the session starts and then after the session finishes, they stay for lunch as well. So there is some return for the host venue and they're coming to the venue at times when we're not doing the floral design workshops.

But the interesting thing for me in terms of the planning has been that I put together this program, 20 weeks, all these different topics of things that I knew I could make or things that sounded interesting, and the things that sounded interesting has been the catch because I got to the week before last and I looked at what I was doing and it said bookmarks and I thought, what was I thinking? How am I going to make a bookmark because by then I got a sense of who was coming and what they like to do and I knew that making a bookmark that was dried flowers was not what they were interested in, they wanted to work with the fresh stuff. So then I had to actually innovate and had to think about what I was going to make.

So it's been a learning exercise for me as well, development exercise for me as well, to think about that broad range of skills and techniques that I've learned over the last 20 years and how I can adjust that for someone who is just learning, just starting out, doesn't know anything at all. And it's probably only interesting in terms of what they can do with that to give as a gift or to use for themselves. And so I determined what I was going to do that week and then looked at the next week and I put down that was living greeting cards. Once again I have no idea what was in my mind. But I worked out something and they went away happy and what has been interesting is that they do that little two hour workshop and they go out through the cafe to leave and they've been so pleased with their efforts that they're showing everyone what they've made, what they've done and thinking about how they can use what they've made to give to people or to do other things with it.

There's been that general development out of the sessions too. I had hoped that there'd be people who would develop a further interest and want to take it to another level and I really did expect it to take probably the whole of the 20 weeks or a fair majority of that to think that they might like to continue learning after that 20 weeks was over, but in fact I've had one already joined up for the online group. And another one who said that they're going in to one of the local shows which is in two weeks time.

Inspiration happened quickly. Also through that forum you got an invite to Bunnings. It's a big deal.

So one of the weeks I had two people come in and they made the flower crowns which is the the circuits of flowers that you wear in your hair. After they made those and I put the photos up on social media, my brother, of all people, liked one of the individual photos. I said to him, do you know this person because we live 40 minutes drive away from one another and I didn't think that their worlds that would interact. And he said, oh yes she's the activities organiser for Bunnings, locally for him. Within a week I'd had an invitation from them to run a couple of workshops for their spring launch, which I did last weekend just gone. The best part of all, you Australian listeners will understand, the absolute best part is that I get paid in Bunnings vouchers. So I don't have to spend the payment on anything practical or ordinary, I can hold on to it and use it for more supplies for my competitions.

At the introduction I was saying to you, listeners, that I'm very excited about it. I'll tell you why. No, I'm not artistic, I'm not into floral art, sadly I have no inclination that way but what I'm excited about is the fact this is a great community initiative. It wasn't designed as a community initiative but naturally happened so we've got a new business in town, a new business that is cafe, music, by locals, for locals and enjoying that sort of thing. All those people in the vicinity, in the community, you gave them an opportunity they did not have before. So now they're coming together, they're meeting and getting the information, so it's a community feel. It's businesses supporting businesses. You're all small business supporting each other and the artist. So to me that's super exciting because we need a lot more initiatives that bring people together to have fun, satisfaction and learning, continuous learning.

It's been about the genuine encouragement of one another as well the people who are coming didn't know one another, they don't bring a friend, they just turn up. So from a very wide geographic range, they're from a very wide age demographic and that was one of the things that resonated really well with me as a result of this activity because for all the time that I've been associated with these structured organizations they had bemoaned the fact that they're not getting any new members, they're not getting any young members. And I went through all of the marketing exercises that we would normally do about trying to get them to identify who their ideal member was or members were. They would brush it aside every time, just saying we can't get anyone under 60 because they're all too busy. Well I can tell you that these people who are coming and they're coming midweek and they're coming for two hours in the middle of the day, they are aged between 30 and 85. So they can get them if you provide them with the right framework for them to do it.

The other thing that Fulyana doesn't know about this whole activity is that in the process of planning it and looking at it, I looked around at what grants might be available. I actually, last week, submitted a grant to run the same program but to run it in southwestern New South Wales where once again there are communities who, in traveling down there once every couple of years to do a more formal floral art show, have come to us and said that they're interested in having something in their own areas. So I put together this program that would be a traveling workshop, one weekend every month for five months to provide the same platform of information and let those communities bring the people together there for that time. I think I've got 12 weeks or something before the results come out but even so, even if it's not successful in this round, I now have a framework that I can travel with. I can talk to other organizations and say if you're interested in this framework, I'll work with you to provide

it and let them take some ownership of it and help them with their membership as well.

That's great and good luck with the outcome with the grant. Thank you so much for sharing all of this, it's really valuable. Can I ask any listeners who are involved or know of community activities that are worth sharing, please let us know, we'll be happy to put it on. For now I know I have to close it, I'm Fulyana Orsborn, she's Kim Baillie and this is Inside Exec.