



MATURE AGED PROGRAM



Case Study: Les Cavanagh

Spending almost 20 years as a telecommunications technician, Les Cavanagh, started his own IT company. Reflecting back on his time in telecoms, Les considered himself a “professional tourist”, he worked on the construction aspect of the business and had a transient life. He believes that this role gave him a good insight into what travellers are looking for and how they want to be treated. It was during this time that he started doing some work with Paronella Park as a subcontractor.

Living around the corner from Paronella, Les’ interest was peaked when he saw a casual position advertised for a shuttle bus driver. He thought “this is something I could do”, so he reached out to park owner Judy and put his hand up for the job. Initial conversations suggested that the position would evolve over time, he couldn’t have imagined quite how this would work out.

Now, the role involves the meet and greet of guests, guided tours of the park and even working as the interface between film crews and the park, ensuring that filming didn’t interfere with park operations. A lot more hands on than when he started!

Les identifies that from a mature age point of view, he has significant life experience which translate to his roles at Paronella. Having dealt with a variety of people throughout his working life he built his ability to make friends or get on with people as they cross his path. This skill is perfect for the tourism industry, an industry built on interactions. It is this skill that sets mature workers apart from younger people who do not always have this ability. Over time, he has learnt not to take things personally and build resilience.

When guests have issues, he demonstrates empathy and knows how to turn around the attitude to create positive experience.

Les looks forward to coming to work which is why he has remained in his position. One of the key things he loves most about Paronella Park is the philosophy about how to treat people, a philosophy that matches well with his own personal values.

Les’ advice to others thinking of moving to the tourism industry – “if you are comfortable talking to and looking after people just do it. Don’t hesitate! It is really satisfying and enjoyable! You go home tired but that’s normal across any job. Give it a go – it’s amazing how the skills that you’ve gained through life experience will be deployed to enhance someone’s experience – I’m talking about natural life skills. It’s incredibly satisfying to know I can be myself and help people out. Tourism is a great industry to be in!”

Employing Mature Aged workers brings so many positives to small business including stability and loyalty.

Most people over 50 have been in the workforce long enough to really know their strengths and weaknesses and have developed an idea of what will and will not work for them in a job. They have had the time to decide what they really want to do, and are less likely to suddenly move out of the business.

Many have become empty nesters and have more time to devote to hobbies and their work. This makes them more available and flexible, and more business focussed.

- Judy Evans, Paronella Park

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PARONELLA PARK

Benefits that Mature Aged Workers bring to the Tourism Industry

Experience

- corporate memory
- learning from earlier mistakes
- good understanding and knowledge of longer-term trends, strategies, rhythms and other cycles
- knowledge of the history of particular problems, what leads to the problems, what mistakes have been made before, knowledge of incident history which includes why a process is done a particular way
- the ability to advise on where a particular approach went wrong in the past and make recommendations as to how to avoid those pitfalls when a similar approach is tried
- knowledge of previous trials and initiatives which tend to get lost through IT and filing systems changes

Networks

- extensive networks across industries
- well-developed networking skills

Risk

- able to be less risk averse
- good understanding of risks and reasonable decisions
- understanding of long-term risks

Judgement

- well-developed professional judgement
- perspective and balanced views

Customers

- customer connections
- can relate to customers of similar age

Skills and knowledge transfer

- transfer of 'tacit' knowledge
- sharing of collective wisdom which is experiential and often not committed in writing

Other

- able to recognise unmet needs
- resilience
- understand how to harness economic potential
- ingenuity – used to undertaking creative endeavours

