

THE MOTHER OF *invention*

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DR KIRSTEN BAULCH KNEW SHE'D HAVE TO WRITE HER OWN PRESCRIPTION IF SHE WERE TO ACHIEVE THE LIFE OF HER DREAMS. FINANCIAL FREEDOM, PHILANTHROPY AND TRAVEL WERE AT THE TOP OF HER WISH LIST. SO SHE INVENTED A BUSINESS THAT REMEDIATED HER DEEPEST DESIRES, AS TONIA ZEMEK DISCOVERED.



KIRSTEN BAULCH

At this time of year senior high school students are busy making plans for the future. Some will enter the workforce while others opt for further study. Travel might even be on the agenda. They're all facing that universal dilemma; what to do after leaving school?

Twenty years ago I was asking myself the same question. Luckily I found the answer easily. I'd always been a storyteller so journalism seemed like a good fit. I figured if I could use words as my currency I'd always be able to pay the rent.

When I meet Noosa's Dr Kirsten Baulch she joins me in reminiscing about career choices. Like me, she's in her late 30s and had a similarly smooth transition. "Study and performing academically came easy to me," she admits.

"It was natural to want to go on and do something like medicine. I wanted something complex and difficult and challenging, but also something that does good for people because I care a lot about other people."

She ended up studying medicine at the University of Queensland. After graduating she interned at the Royal Brisbane Hospital. Around this time she met her future husband, Graeme, a local businessman with his own commercial lighting company. Meanwhile, Kirsten was having her own lightbulb moment.

She was contemplating using her medical background for "something new and different".

"I was never going to be that person who just sort of worked for someone and clocked in and clocked out. I wanted to have choice over where and how I worked."

Graeme was undertaking business studies and encouraged Kirsten to do the same. Remarkably, she managed to combine her long hospital hours with stints of study. After two years she completed a graduate certificate in business administration.

In 2000 Graeme and Kirsten married. Their work kept them at different addresses. Graeme was based in Brisbane while Kirsten worked as a GP in Gympie. In her spare time Kirsten's imagination took hold ... a business was brewing.

The business was Medimobile, a nationwide workplace influenza vaccination service. The work would be seasonal, as the vaccinations had to be done before winter, so she could continue practising as a GP for part of the year.

"I think starting a business is difficult and it's not for everybody. You have to be a bit fearless and a bit radical. There's a lot of hard work and a lot of focus and energy that goes into creating something like this."

When the business was still in its infancy, Kirsten gave birth to her son, James. He accompanied her to Medimobile headquarters and, together with a couple of female staff, they juggled caring for the baby and the business.

“I actually feel I was put on earth to save lives ... I realised I had this natural drive and ability to create businesses but I thought, ‘What if I could tie the two together?’”

I tell Kirsten it sounds almost like having two babies. She agrees and says it's like having twins. “They're just two twins that look very different but are equally hungry for your attention and time.”

The nurturing paid off as both James, now four years old, and Medimobile are thriving. The company has won a Telstra Business Award and has twice been listed among the *Business Review Weekly's* 100 fastest growing companies in Australia.

The accolades are nice recognition but Kirsten's motivation comes from a much deeper place. “I actually feel I was put on earth to save lives. In the beginning I thought it was to save lives in the conventional sense as a doctor. Then I realised I had this natural drive and ability to create businesses but I thought, ‘What if I could tie the two together?’”

She quickly found her answer. One dollar from every vaccination is donated to a life-saving charity. So far, Medimobile has raised almost half a million dollars in donations.

Each year, Kirsten and Graeme, together with their staff, decide where their contributions should be directed. “It usually goes to projects that give health services to children in the third world.”

Kirsten now has her sights set on somehow contributing to the work of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI). The alliance already has some formidable forces involved, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Kirsten says GAVI's work appeals to her because they help children in poor countries gain access to life-saving vaccines.

As a mother and doctor, it's obvious Kirsten has a natural affinity with children. It's no surprise her latest business venture revolves around kids. Nationwide Nannies is an Australia-wide casual babysitting service that launched in April. Thanks to Medimobile, Kirsten's now well-versed in the logistics of big business.

“We've already built systems around having a large workforce where all the checks and balances had to be in place. So to take that software and adapt it to the nannies' environment was quite simple.”

Software and technology are recurring themes throughout our chat. As well as applauding her staff, for whom she has great respect, Kirsten is grateful for the freedom technology affords her and her family.

She's now able to stay connected online but base herself overseas four months of the year. A love of Italy has led to her family now calling Lake Como their second home. “Noosa and Lake Como are two places where somehow our little family unit just thrives, and it works.”

I congratulate Kirsten on the wonderful lifestyle she's created. She reminds me it's been 20 years in the making. “I can't believe it! I mean there's a lot of planning and a lot of hard work and all kinds of bumps in the road and exhaustion but I've finally been able to say I pulled it off and dreams come true.”

Kirsten now wants to use her own experience to help nurture the next generation of entrepreneurs. She's thrilled to be on the board of the Innovation Centre at the University of the Sunshine Coast. It's a place where businesses are supported in the start-up phase. When it comes to mentors, I'd say Kirsten is just what the doctor ordered. ■

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