

GREAT WORKPLACES EQUAL A GREAT WORLD



Written on the 10 March 2015 by Jenna Rathbone



SUE-ELLEN Watts admits she is disrupting the human resources space, but it is all for the good of business.

The founder of wattsnext, a national HR consultancy, is turning companies inside out and proving that HR is one of the most important aspects of a company's growth and success.

Founded seven years ago in a spare bedroom, Watts has grown the company to assist clients all over Australia with a workforce of 15 based in Brisbane.

In addition, her team consults to clients in America and is looking at opening offices in Sydney and Melbourne by the end of the year.

"I didn't have any contacts, I didn't know anyone in Brisbane, I didn't have any money and I had this new born

baby, but I had this vision that I wanted to create a business that would become nationally recognised that disrupted HR," says Watts.

"From my experience being an internal practitioner I felt that HR wasn't delivering enough of a return for business and I really wanted to help small to medium business in all aspects of their HR for everything relating to the people in their business and doing it in a way that was commercial and creative."

Wattsnext provides a range of services, including industrial relations which looks after compliance components of employees; HR management, performance management which seeks to improve workplace culture; and recruitment.

The business consults to clients including Surf Life Saving Queensland, Ellivo Architects and 96five FM.

"We work with every industry because we are very customised in our approach, we really look at the DNA of an organisation and how HR practices can bring a business alive or create a culture specifically for them," says Watts.

"We have many clients that come to us from a reactive point of view. Something has gone wrong, someone is not performing or there is some sort of issue, so we assist in turning the environment into a great place to work.

"Our actual mission is to create great workplaces. That is what we are trying to do and we strongly believe that the more businesses we can turn into great workplaces, the more impact we can have on the community and the world."

Watts describes HR as "the most important part of any business" and says every business owner needs to be working to ensure their staff are happy, performing and developing.

"Every business has people, and I don't think there would be any business owner out there that didn't recognise people as the most important part of their business," says Watts. "If people aren't working, the business isn't working."

Watts adds that a challenge of building the company has been getting business owners to understand what HR actually is.

She says a lot of people either think HR is payroll or it is about rules and policies and telling people what they can and can't do a result which Watts attributes to poor HR practitioners.

"Business owners don't understand what HR is - they don't understand what it can do because there are not enough practitioners out there doing a good job in this space, so they haven't seen the benefits of focusing on it," says Watts.

"It really is about aligning your HR strategy to your business strategy and really understanding where your business is going and how you get your people engaged in that."

Since inception of the company, watsnext has seen 20-30 per cent revenue growth year on year.

"There are still mixed feelings around whether things are recovering or whether people are struggling," says Watts.

"We are really happy to say that we are growing and we are finding that we are getting more people coming to us proactively.

"They are coming to us because they want to make their business better, opposed to 12 months ago when people were coming to us because things went wrong, and that is really positive."

CEO of Principal Finance Daniel Gronert engaged the behavioural profiling services of watsnext which he says gave a clear understanding of how his staff worked the way they did.

"It was used very much as a team bonding experience as well as a process that was going to help the team grow together and understand the working practices of each individual thanks to having a better understanding of how their personalities work," says Gronert.