



## Trudy Robinson – A Synopsis

As with many entrepreneurs, I had a very poor education.

There wasn't much choice – the women in the agricultural neighbourhood where I grew up either married their neighbours and had children, became a herd tester (dairy), or if they were extremely clever and confident they could become a nurse. I just didn't fit in.

So I left school and home at 15 and went to the 'big smoke' to attend secretarial college. A dictatorial principal who came out of the dark ages drummed the principles of being the ultimate subservient secretary, pitmans shorthand, bookkeeping and typing on old manual clunky typewriters. I still didn't fit in but I learnt.

My first job at the ripe old age of 16 was as secretary to a partner in a legal firm. I feel so sorry for this partner – he deserved better than I was then, but I worked hard, gained some credibility in the work force. Then, at 17, I decided I was ready for the international market. I left my country and arrived in Australia – Bundaberg of all places – and soon settled in Lismore, NSW. I quickly found work in another legal firm setting up their new Word Processing system – a Remington NBI 3000. It was a state of the art, dual 8" floppy drive system (no hard drives invented in that era). Much of the new technology and use of computing that we have today was expedited by the demands of the legal industry when Word Processing was first developed. It provided extreme benefit to a text-based industry so the companies specialising in this software grew rapidly and had a hungry market. Fortunately those working in that industry also moved with the times. Soon I was in demand in Brisbane moving from company to company setting up Word Processing systems – particularly using Wang environments. I travelled regional Australia and ended up in Perth, again working in legal IT support teams rolling out the latest Word Processing software to law clerks, secretaries and solicitors alike.

The legal industry is a unique environment to learn early work ethics within. If you don't have the essential skills of being organised, logical, disciplined and consistent – you soon learn them or you leave.

Starting as a legal user, then moving into the legal support infrastructure gave me many of the core business principles which I still apply today.

From Perth I climbed on board an aeroplane with two like-minded 23 year olds and arrived in good old London with a backpack – bound for the European adventure. 'Fate' interrupted by means of a telephone call from a tube station to Wang (UK) whereby the HR Manager offered me a role as a Business Analyst. So the backpack was abandoned for a briefcase and I decided that career took priority over gallivanting.

Goodness knows what the British conservative business market thought of this young, under-educated, female, loud, 'antipodean' Business Analyst as I travelled the UK working in a pre and post-sales position. I won many supporters but learnt from many mistakes as well. My ethics were always sound – but perhaps the delivery of them was not always presented in the most conventional or conformist manner. I've never been one to fit well into pre-defined 'boxes'.

My focus was always on client needs and this often didn't sit well with my managers who were more centred on chargeable services. I worked passionately within pre-sales and everything from one-on-one demonstrations through to travelling exhibitions and roadshows. When a client was won, we would transition into the post-sales implementation and support role so project management and training needs analysis/implementation were key skills prior to them being recognised terms.

Necessity is often the mother to opportunity, and after five years working as a Business Analyst I established my own company and worked in client companies on a contract basis. In between setting up a training organisation within a high-end real estate company, managing projects and managing help desks in a trading bank, I travelled, bought real estate and generally did all the things that single women didn't tend to do by themselves in London. I was on the high-end learning rollercoaster and I was, and am, never afraid of taking action. Lifetime learning is my mantra.

I followed my heart back to Australia in late 1992 and settled in Sydney. PCs were becoming more prolific in the workplace but I was used to mainframes and mini computers, so I ventured into a different industry. I worked as a licensed Private Investigator, particularly investigating potential insurance fraud – public liability, workers compensation, third party etc.

Inasmuch as this may seem quite a change, it wasn't that different. It was still about being methodical, tracking every step of an incident, writing full reports, leaving no stone unturned and taking legal statements. I saw extreme abuse of the business back-end and I was appalled at what many called 'free money' – what they could claim off insurance companies. I also saw what the insurers would not spend time defending – and that many employers had no choice when their insurers decided to accept a workers compensation claim even though they knew that it was fabricated, distorted or excessive. The value of the claim often affected the insurer's decision as to whether they should defend a claim (ie spend money on it). So the employer company's insurance premiums went up significantly because of the claim even though they may not have done anything wrong. Their training, records management and risk mitigation were their major undoing. These issues were to be the instigator of my future business.

There are many egos in the PI world and I wasn't very good at massaging the right ones so I realised after some time that I needed to return to the IT industry. I also decided that Brisbane was my home town and I returned in or around 1994.

I knew I needed to get a better handle on "PC" technology so I returned to the contract training market. I qualified as a trainer and workplace assessor and proceeded to learn as I taught. After a few years, one particularly obnoxious attendee in a training course made life difficult for everyone in the room for 2 days and at one stage I envisaged myself throttling the man in his seat. I have interminable patience for anyone who is trying to help themselves but it was time to move on before I actioned my visions.

So over the next few years I obtained qualifications in small business management and project management while overseeing IT

projects in the legal and energy utility markets.

Y2K was of course all about issues with abbreviations and people were running out to buy generators and plant their own carrots so that they would survive after the technology meltdown of 01/01/00. I aided one major energy utility through Government analysis of their Y2K preparedness and, inasmuch as many people now mock the attention that was given to this fear – there were many issues that were actively resolved that would have caused problems after January 1 2000. On the eve of that major occasion I, with many others, found myself in the middle of Sydney harbour on a small ferry vessel hired by a long term friend, drinking far too much champagne, over indulging in fantastic food and watching the most amazing fireworks pollute the atmosphere. I wouldn't have swapped it for anything else in the world. What a milestone. And of course the lights didn't go out and the world kept on turning.

During these years, terms such as Compliance, Occupational Health and Safety, Quality Assurance, the International Standards Organisation and other terms became more prevalent.

As I moved from company to company, I managed my projects in a manner that meant everyone in the project team was contributing to the whole-of-project (and client) benefit. All project deliverables were structured and named so that they were filed and could be found. They were, basically, a mini records management environment within an often chaotic client world.

I continued my studies and qualified as a Justice of the Peace and obtained my masters in e-commerce while I continued working with clients. I would often be introduced to a company to provide one service, then I would move from one project to another. I found that one department rarely shared information with another unless it was setup as part of a CRM or accounts system. So, a person from one department (say sales) would need to interrupt another employee (say marketing) to determine the status of an item or promotion prior to writing a contract with a client. They would often feel and express frustration that the other person wasn't available so they couldn't continue with their priorities.

New employees would come into a company and would rarely be able to find what their predecessor had been working on and they would start all over again. This became so prevalent that it was 'expected'.

Individuals would continually need to interrupt other individuals to ask questions or find out the status of something prior to being able to continue with their own job. Often something as simple as how to order business cards or a uniform would take two people half an hour because one had to step the other through how to go about a simple task. Time was wasted and the information provider repeatedly wasted time providing the same information.

Worst was the fact that people didn't know what was available to them and what wasn't - so they either re-invented the wheel so multiple versions of the same requirement were created or they simply didn't refer to or use what they should have.

Companies were continually wasting their resources and losing their internal intellectual property. They knew it, they felt the pain, they paid for the wasted time but they didn't know how to stop the leaking sieve.

And of course I continued to see companies expose themselves to risk by not informing or training their staff properly, or even if they did they couldn't prove it. Information, even if available within the company, wasn't shared appropriately.

It was as though all my hard learnt lessons and observations had brought me to this one requirement. The structured legal background led to an architecture that could be shared across an organisation and of course it also predisposed me to ensuring this environment would be shared and transparent to alleviate business risk. The IT-support gave me the knowledge of usergroups, security requirements and other IT impacts.

The business analyst years helped with client focus and market requirements. My training and workplace assessor skills contributed to the training and assessment criteria content that needed to be included.

In particular, my PI knowledge gave me an edge on understanding how to mitigate risk through comprehensive, shared, documentation and procedure. Project management experience has enabled me to structure the retention of records for a project's duration as well as the long term reference to mitigate or provide support in the event of litigation. Working within many business types has shown me the commonalities between them which can be used to standardise a system but the differences where customisation is required. In addition, working within the IT industry has shown me that there are good and bad 'consultants' and that there is often a weighted reason why some particular systems are presented as the solution to a business need. In particular, I see new software continually introduced to solve a business requirement even though there may be another way around it which has less impact financially and on business continuity.

So, I developed this product called Filesure® and I have introduced this into numerous organisations. However, I am moving on to bigger and better things and am very much ready for a new challenge.

I'm at a different stage of my life now. I've done the warehouse conversion, I've lived inner city and am now into the tree-change. I love growing my own food organically, I take the time to enjoy my six year old's paintings and I look after my mother in law. However I do, and always will, need a mental challenge so a great working environment is important to me.

I still love helping those who are willing to help themselves and this is part of why I teach Project Management skills to diploma level, at night. It's not just helping people obtain a qualification - it's assisting them in one step as part of their journey.

When I spoke at a Graduate Ceremony after completing a Diploma in Entrepreneurism, the key to my message was lifetime learning - I still practice it and I love empowering others to take on the challenge.

I hope you enjoy whatever lesson has presented itself to you today.

Happy days.

