

Peter McCloskey has been in hospitality all his life. Fresh Catering, which he launched in 1999, has become Sydney's premier catering company with a revenue of \$26 million and about 500 staff, including casuals. Yet seven years ago he was ready to walk away from it all.

It was a time of personal questioning, when the idea of joining the Church seemed a more fulfilling option than running a business devoted to profit and material success.

What Peter came to realise, however, was that he was already in the serving business, with a real opportunity to make a difference to his clients and in particular to his own people. Leadership and culture were the keys to creating the business he wanted Fresh Catering to be.

Peter reflects on a previous business he had built and describes the culture at the time as pretty sick.

"It was all about money, all about me and my success," said Peter, "and that tended to work its way throughout the culture of the business."

Peter became very enthusiastic about the concept of creating a company for the benefit of the people it employs. One where people are led well and offered an environment and a culture that can have a major, positive influence on their lives and their wellbeing. And the more successful the business becomes, the more people it can reach.



"I could see that when people come to work for you, and you give them a great experience, it sets them up for life. That's the reason I stay in business."

To use a cliché more relevant than fresh, the proof is in the pudding, and years on, Peter is convinced that a company built on the back of a dedicated, motivated and loyal staff is a recipe for business success.

Peter McCloskey
Fresh Catering

In fact so much faith has he in the transformative power of employment that Fresh has for several years now been recruiting people from drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres to provide the leg up that meaningful work and a supportive environment can provide. The impact has been profound, not only on the recruits themselves, many of whom remain valued members of the Fresh family, but also for the rest of the staff who feel part of something bigger than a nine-to-five job.

Peter is anxious not to sound proselytising about his personal beliefs, but maintains that there are values beyond mere profit and shareholder return that not only contribute to a business's success but enhance its value within the society in which it exists. It will be very evident by now that vision and innovation are key ingredients of the Fresh Catering story.

The business is strongly positioned in the arts and culture segment, contracted to run some of Sydney's most iconic and historic venues - the Sydney Theatre Company, Museum of Contemporary Art, Carriageworks, The Mint, The Museum of Sydney among others - which provide a variety of exotic venues for client events.

It has forged a high-profile partnership with celebrity chef James Viles of two-hatted Biota Dining fame, to consult, create menus and on occasion make personal appearances.

It creates original and distinctive menus targeted to the specific demographics of its venues and clientele, eschewing the standard fare approach of other caterers.

It regularly wins accolades and awards that confirm its place as a leader in its field.

It is passionate about best produce, sustainability, and a farm-to-plate approach that provides the best local ingredients available.

All of this with an unerring focus on consistency, to ensure that standards are scrupulously maintained, its hard-won reputation protected and that growth is never allowed to compromise the brand.

As Peter says, "Getting there is hard; staying there is harder."

In all of this there is one other mystery ingredient. Peter's life has been in hospitality, his friendships and his contacts are in hospitality, and even the largest commercial kitchen can be claustrophobic.

"The sole reason I joined The CEO Institute was to break that world that I involved myself in, with all of the language around hospitality, and it's been great for me. There are so many times I've sat and listened to other people from different worlds and come back and changed the way I do things."

For Peter McCloskey, it's all part of keeping Fresh at the top of the catering menu.