

A Personal Story of Overcoming Challenges, Embracing Opportunities, and Giving Back

Early Years: Facing the Unknown

It is fair to say that my time at school was filled with challenges. From an early age, I struggled with learning, and it wasn't until I was nine that I was diagnosed with dyslexia. At the time, diagnosing children with dyslexia was a new concept, and unfortunately, there were no systems or supports in place to help children navigate these difficulties. Instead, I found myself placed in the headmaster's class, made to sit in the corner, and was quickly labelled as "disabled" and a troublemaker. My main directive was to sit quietly and watch the world go by, feeling isolated and misunderstood.

Despite these difficulties, I never missed a single day of school. I understood early on that staying present was crucial, as I simply couldn't afford to fall behind any further.

Work Ethic and Early Interests

From a young age, I sought opportunities to work. My weekends, school holidays, and sometimes even evenings were filled with various jobs. This hard work paid off—I managed to buy my first car at the age of eleven, which sparked my lifelong interest in motor vehicles.

At fifteen, I began an apprenticeship as a panel beater. It took just over five years to complete, during which I continued to work weekends, Christmas holidays, and the occasional night shift back on the farm, primarily driving harvesters and tractors. This period instilled in me a strong work ethic and a love for machinery and vehicles.

Venturing Into Business: The Rental Car Industry

By the time I was twenty, I was working for a client who owned a rental car company. I had already been repairing his vehicles at night for several years. My journey with Thrifty Car Rentals began as a car groomer, but within six months, I was promoted to rental representative, and shortly after, branch manager in Christchurch. Within ten months, I became the South Island Manager and the New Zealand Fleet Controller.

At twenty-five, I seized the opportunity to buy into Thrifty Car Rentals, purchasing the Picton Branch. I handled everything—from purchasing vehicles to marketing and promotions. However, the operation faced major challenges during the Gulf War and a significant ferry strike, which nearly brought the company to its knees. At this point, I diversified into two new ventures: a boat rental operation and AA Host Car Rentals in Auckland. These ventures provided the necessary funds to revive my Thrifty franchise but also increased my vulnerability to the bank.

Embracing Change: New Challenges and Growth

By age thirty-two, I felt ready for a change. I began selling off cars, the rental company, and the boats. This led me to Ford Motor Company, where I became a trainee Dealer

Principal in Blenheim. The business was in disarray and under receivership, with twenty-five staff but no customers, cars, or cash flow. I introduced processes to identify key staff, assess their skills, and revitalise the business. Visiting other Ford dealerships, I learned best practices in workshops and sales departments, which I applied to transform the struggling branch into the top performer within three years.

Despite this success, I realised that being a “glorified car salesman” was not my true calling. The competitive nature of large dealerships in New Zealand, where success often breeds resentment, made me reconsider my path.

A New Direction: Waikato Milking Systems

At thirty-six, I applied for a job at a milking machine company in Christchurch—an industry I knew nothing about. The owner saw potential in my CV and gave me a chance. My only question at the interview was about having direct reports; the answer was “zero,” which suited me perfectly. I started as the Central South Island Rep and, within eighteen months, became the South Island Manager, overseeing sales for the region.

My working relationship with the owner was straightforward: I had full support to make sales, but if I made a mistake, I had to fix it and report back. As the industry heated up, I expanded operations by acquiring a rotary platform building business and a hot water cylinder company. This increased our average contracts significantly and, inevitably, my direct reports grew to thirty-five, plus staff across fifteen dealerships.

In 2014, I became General Manager for the South Island, spending significant time in Hamilton at the decision-making table and personally ensuring every installation across the region met high standards. With personal sales of just over 110 million over my service with the company. Waikato Milking Systems was sold in 2018, and I was asked to relocate to Hamilton, after careful consideration, I chose to remain in the South Island, close to family and friends, and resigned after twenty years of dedication.

Recent Years: Giving Back and New Ventures

Since then, I have held roles as an operations manager in trailer parts, worked as a robotic consultant in dairy feeding, and spent four years running an agricultural contracting business with branches of the company in liquid fertiliser and forestry and biofuel operations. Most recently, I have been part of the Boost Learning programme, supporting nine-year-old students struggling with dyslexia—a full-circle moment that has brought immense satisfaction and success.

Reflections: Rewarding Challenges and Looking Ahead

My life’s journey has been a whirlwind—rewarding, challenging, and filled with growth. Each experience, from overcoming the struggles of dyslexia to leading teams and building businesses, has shaped my perspective and instilled a deep sense of empathy. I look forward to sharing my foresight, experience, and empathy with others. If my story resonates with you or you wish to connect, please feel free to reach out for a chat.