



In[ter]view: Kay Neill

Verse Mag's Regular Graduate Interview

In a VERSE first, Head Editor Jesse Neill, discusses career advice, parenting, and cleaning his room with his mum and CEO of CHG, Kay Neill.

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How would you describe your role?

I work for CHG, a South Australian owned and operated occupational health business that has been providing occupational health services to address the needs of Australian employers since 1976. As CEO, I have responsibility for setting the strategic direction and am ultimately accountable for the performance of all financial, operational and people related aspects of the business.

How long have you been with this company?

My length of service is 30 years having been through a couple of ownership changes. I initially started in the company as a receptionist and have worked in pretty much every area of the business. I worked my way up through various management positions until I became the CEO in 2002, having completed my degree in 1998.

What were you doing before this?

After completing high school I travelled overseas as an exchange student. On my return to Australia, I worked at the Womens and Childrens hospital and medical surgery in administrative roles. So really, I've worked in health my whole career.

When you were studying at university, is this where you expected to end up?

While I was working for CHG, the Chairman encouraged me to get a degree. The Finance Manager was leaving and so our Chairman suggested that I should apply, however explained that I would need formal qualifications to support my work experience.

I guess I initially saw my studies as a means to an end to achieve this promotion, so never really imagined it would lead me to the position of CEO.

What was studying at university like for you?

I finished my degree, Bachelor of Business (Administrative Management) twenty years ago - it was very difficult as I studied via distance learning at a time where our modern technology was still in its early stages. There were no recorded lectures online, no electronic submission of assignments, or even reliable online resources. At the start of every semester I would receive a pile of photocopied study notes and assignment guidelines and if I was experiencing any problems, I had to go to campus to seek assistance.

I was working full-time in a job that required a lot of overtime work and was also trying to run a home, a finance team, sit on a board and was going through IVF to have you!! It was very stressful. The day I received my degree was one of the proudest moments of my life. I was the first one in our immediate family to achieve a tertiary qualification and you had arrived 8 weeks early, which made the completion of my last two assignments a real challenge!

On that note, as the first mother-son interview in Verse, is there anything you wish us kids would do differently?

Clean your rooms and answer our calls/messages on the smartphone that is always attached to your hand and interestingly able to respond to your friends! On



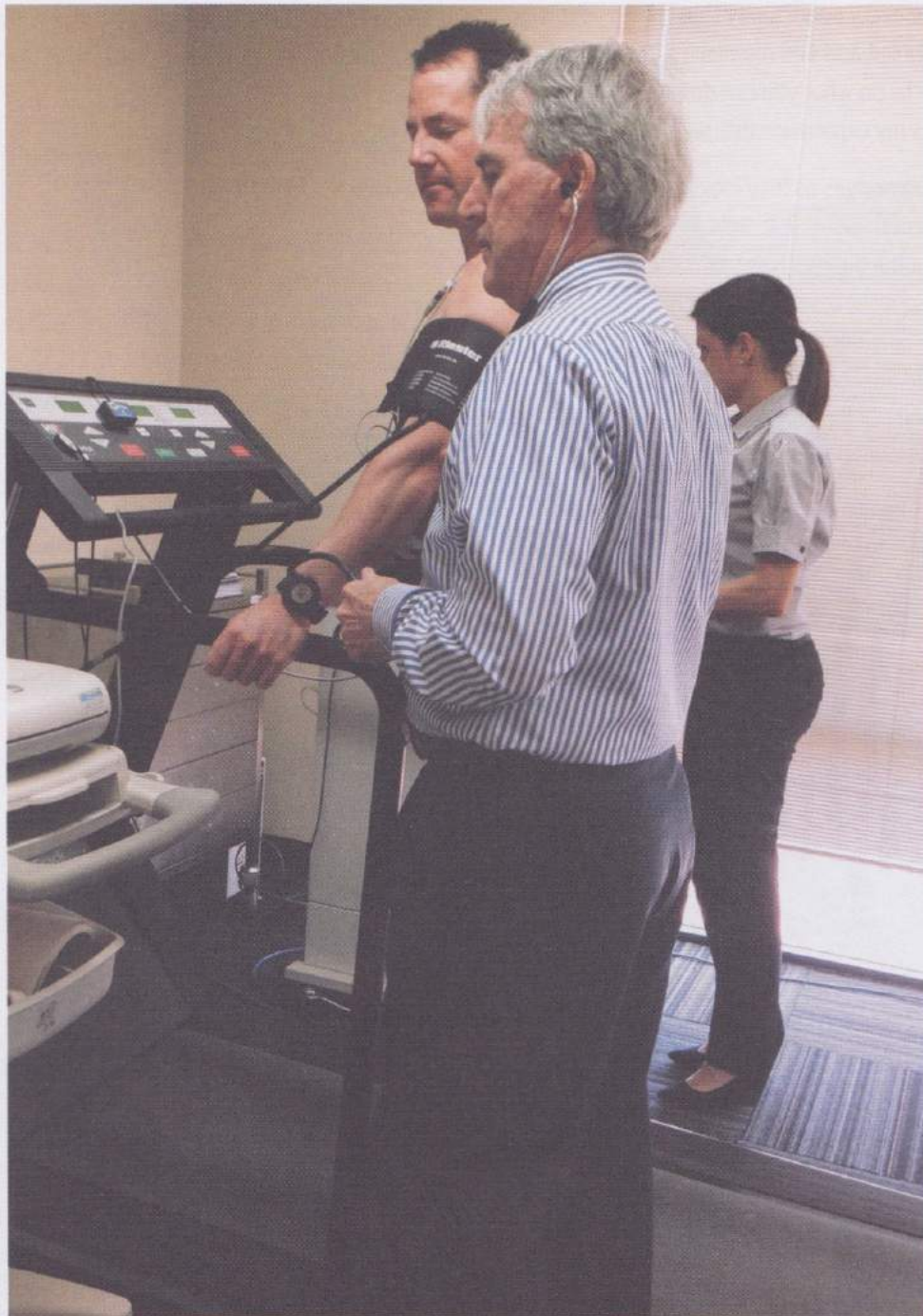
a serious note, I love the way this generation is able to evaluate and question the truth in what you see, read or hear. I feel social media is the greatest hope we have for engaging our young people in community service and political leadership in the future.

Over the past few years there has been a lot of attention placed on the percentage of females with leadership roles in Australia, what is your perspective on this and what advice do you have for young women?

I can honestly say in my career, I have always been promoted on merit and paid commensurate with males doing similar roles. I think there is a danger in trying to

address the imbalance through any recruiting approach that is not at its core based on skills, experience, and fit; as opposed to a target that leads to decisions being made on gender. However, greater emphasis must be placed on engaging women in leadership development and mentoring throughout their career, identifying strategies to keep developing their skills while they are providing care giving roles, and encouraging young women at school to enter professions that have been largely male dominated in the past.





I say embrace every opportunity that comes your way. Empower yourself and find motivation from within. Be brave and focus on what you can do rather than what you can't. It is my experience that women will often

not stretch themselves as they look at a position description and think "at this point in time I can only do 70 per cent of the duties, therefore there will be other people more qualified, so I won't apply." Instead, you should think "why not!?" At the end of our careers we do not want to look back and think "what if" or "I should have" – we want to look back and think "I was the best person I could have been in all aspects of my life."

Something students can relate to is stress, especially around exam time. As your job comes with many challenges and pressures, what things do you like to do to relax in your off-time?

The beach is my sanctuary. I try to walk at the beach every morning, as I need physical activity to help me maintain my resilience, perspective and well-being.

Taking time out to experience a sunrise or sunset helps me to reconnect with the importance of the simple things in life.

What advice would you have for those currently studying the same degree/area as you?

Be grateful that you live in a country that allows you to study and develop skills to be a life-long and life-wide learner. The ability to embrace change and be adaptable is essential for your future career. The key to success in business in this decade is having good self-awareness, resilience, emotional intelligence, being prepared to disrupt the status quo and to use your degree as a launching pad to the next stage; rather than seeing it as something to get through or an ending. We live in exciting times and the best news is that the job you will have in 20 years has probably not even been contemplated yet!



The White Ballroom

