



The Goss on Dale

Taxes and trusts might bore you to tears, but not Dale Gatherum-Goss. He lives for this stuff! This is the same man who wanted to be a chef when he grew up and admits to liking heavy metal. We decided to find out what else one of Australia's most respected accountants would 'fess up to.

story **Eynas Brodie** photography **Estelle Judah**

Who is Dale Gatherum-Goss?

I'm an accountant and I'm involved with property in two ways – one, as an investor – it's a passion of mine and my wife – and two, as a professional. All of our clients are investors so we're constantly talking to people about property, how it works, why it works, what to do, what not to do – all those sorts of things.

What's your background?

Well, later this year I celebrate 25 years as an accountant. In the early days I worked for a boutique accounting firm who had some of the richest people in Australia as their clients, people who are listed in Australia's Top 200 richest people that BRW puts out. And it was fascinating to see... what they did to create wealth. I didn't want to be an accountant. I actually wanted to be a chef, but when I was in high school we had to come up with one more elective and the careers people decided that if I was going to be a chef, I should understand something about accounting because then I could run my own business. I reluctantly went into that and... got a perfect score in most of the tests and exams. They literally frogmarched me down to sit in front of an accountant at a careers night and basically did the same with organising work experience. I finished my last year 12 exam on a Friday afternoon and started work experience the following Monday. During that time they offered me a job for summer, and two weeks later they offered me a job if I wanted to work full-time and study part-time, and I've never gotten around to being a chef! It's probably a good thing actually.

Are you a good cook?

I think so, yes. I love to cook.

Do you enjoy what you do?

Yes, I do. I'm a very lucky person because I get to indulge my passion for investing and to be constantly stimulated and inspired by talking to people who are doing the same sorts of things.

Why did you want to start your own business?

It was something I'd always dreamed of.

Twenty years ago, my wife and I would sit and talk about the business that we'd create, the culture that we'd have in that business, the people, the things that we'd do, the way we'd go about doing it and I suppose the desire to have a little more control over what we did.

What was the scariest part about setting it up?

I think just stepping into the unknown. I walked away from a job nearly 13 years ago now that paid me 70-odd thousand dollars a year plus all the bonuses and benefits, to starting a business with no clients at all, with no income coming in, putting everything at risk.

Are you someone who lives the job 24/7?

I would have to agree with that. As a habit, I start work very early in the morning... and I do that because I need to get more out of the day than I have hours to do so, and so I need to sacrifice a little bit of sleep when Sue and the kids are sleeping so that I can go home at 5.30 or 6 o'clock and have dinner with my family and spend time with them. But invariably, even after dinner, I'll sit and do some work, or I'm constantly reading – whether it be magazines or books on tax or books on investing. It's a big part of our lives. We walk it, we talk it, we eat it, we breathe it – it's just all consuming in some ways.

How many children do you have?

I've got three children: James who's about to turn 21, Lisa who's about to turn 20 and Kelly who's 13.

Do you have any pets?

Yes, we've got a boxer. His name is Buster and we've had him now for about nine years. He's getting rather old but he still retains that stupid childishness that boxers always have.

What was your first investment?

My first investment was buying shares and that would have been about 20 years ago. I remember the crash of 1987 vividly and quite emotionally.

What about your first property buy?

It was back in the '80s when the govern-

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ment took away negative gearing that we bought our first property. I think they only took it away for about six months and then they re-brought it back in. Property prices doubled in a period, literally, of about six to twelve months because so many people could come back into the negative gearing aspect of it. We've never really looked back.

What's the biggest mistake you've made?

Probably selling some of the properties that we bought earlier on, where we'd buy them, sell them and move on and buy something else. We look back now and think 'if only we'd kept those'. They would have multiplied three, four, five, six times in value from what we paid and keeping them now would have meant so much more to our overall wealth position.

What's the best investment you've made?

I'd probably say the investment in my education, not as an accountant but as an investor. We've spent a lot of time and a lot of money buying books, going to seminars, reading and learning about investment. In terms of property, probably the two shops that we've bought. We bought those when the owner wanted around \$200,000 and we ended up buying them for \$98,000, and they've certainly increased in value about three times since.

How did you get them so cheap?

We bought when the market for commercial property was pretty flat. The shops had been vacant for almost two years and needed quite a bit of work. The owner was an elderly man who lived quite a way from them and his family were pushing him to sell for any price he could get. There was so little interest in the

properties that no-one – not even the real estate agent or the owner – turned up to the auction. Our original interest was based on the agent quoting the shops at a certain size. But, in the process of us doing our due diligence we discovered the agent had misrepresented the facts. So, we re-negotiated and made it clear that we were the only potential buyer and that they had been dishonest. The offer of \$49,000 each was then made on the basis that this was as high as we would pay as a result of the agent's behaviour. We'd almost given up when we heard nothing for a few days, but just before the offer was to expire we were thrilled when we got the call saying that the offer was reluctantly accepted.

What's your take on the market?

We don't get too hung up on the current market. We always believe that there's a good opportunity available, it's just a matter of finding it. We've bought two properties in the last 12 months. I think it's Jan Somers that says 'it's not a matter of timing the market, it's a matter of *time* in the market'.

How many properties do you own?

Currently eight and we're looking at developing two of those within the next year and we're looking at buying another one in the next six to twelve months.

Apart from the business premises, are the rest of your properties residential?

Yes, they are. We've got one in Western Australia that we bought 12 months ago and the remainder are in Victoria... within a 10-km radius of where we are here.

What advice do you wish you had when you were starting out?

Probably just to do it. Stop worrying about

when's the right time or how to do some of these things, just go out and buy more investments. And then hold them, stop selling them. I wish someone had pointed out to me a little bit earlier the folly in selling property and giving away so much money to banks, real estate agents, solicitors, the government in tax, just so we could buy another property and then go through and pay all the stamp duty, legal fees and bank fees all over again.

Do you have a role model?

Not as such. I suppose there are two people I look to. When I first started my career, I worked for a little Scotsman and he was a wonderful character. I learnt a great deal from him and a lot of the things that I still do are based on those early days of training that he gave me. One of the other people that I use as a role model,



as strange as it may seem, is Billy Connolly, the comedian. We've always looked at the insane side of life and having a great laugh is a big part of our lifestyle.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I don't have a lot of spare time. Most of my time is taken up in either my work, my reading – both in terms of tax reading and investment reading – and I probably read 20 or 30 investment books a year. In the remainder of my spare time, I spend time with my family, particularly Sue. I do read a lot. I listen to music. I

read another 20 novels a year. We very rarely watch television, so we just spend a lot of quiet time I suppose.

What kind of music do you like?

I've got a very eclectic taste in music, depending on my mood. I'll listen to anything from classical music to heavy metal. I'm a big fan of Prince and of Kate Bush, and even a lot of the current stuff.

With all the tax reading you do, would you say you know tax inside out?

I think anyone who ever said that is fooling themselves enormously. Tax is a constant change. Roughly a quarter of our *Tax Act* changes each and every year and so there's never a way of ever being in control of it. It's just a matter of being aware of changes and trying to remain as up to date as you

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can, so I'm forced by the very nature of my profession to continue reading and learning to stay in touch with it all.

What are your bad habits?

You can't print a few of them! My bad habits would be that I've got an enormous sweet tooth. I love chocolate and sweet foods and I do drink. I love a good whisky and a good wine.

What has been your greatest professional achievement?

Probably starting the business and growing it. It's grown quite successfully year in, year out. From a professional perspective as an accountant, I've also been to court, defending a client against the Tax Office and won, and that's something I'm very proud of. We're probably going back about 14 or 15 years now, where we took on the Tax Office over an issue of whether somebody was in the business of running a primary production business or whether it was a hobby. The Tax Office argued that it was

a hobby, we argued that it wasn't and we were able to put together enough evidence and enough argument to convince the court that the Tax Office was wrong and we were right.

What's been your greatest personal achievement?

My family, without a doubt. I have an enormous relationship with my family. We're very close together, the five of us, and it's brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

What do you look for in an investment property?

We've actually got a checklist, believe it or not. That checklist is a one-page simple document. So, for example, we prefer newer properties rather than older properties. We prefer good land content – on the checklist it says 700 sqm. We prefer

the building to be brick rather than wood. We prefer it to have two bathrooms. We prefer it to be within a kilometre of shops, medical suites, schools, public transport. A secure backyard, car accommodation – a lot of basic stuff and stuff that most people would say they want, but we've formalised it with a checklist.

What would a typical day be like for you?

There's no such thing as a typical day in our office. Our office is quite insane at times. I can't tell you the conversations we had at lunchtime, but we were sitting there with tears rolling down our faces, laughing together as a group. A typical day for me might start in the office at six o'clock in the morning with answering about 50 different emails... then I might see three or four clients and then I might spend the afternoon dealing with issues within the office, reviewing the work that other accountants produce, answering more emails and questions that come in throughout the day, and then hopefully

coming home at 5.30 to spend time with the family.

How do you create a good culture in your office?

We spend a lot of time together as a group and we've always worked on the basis that we should enjoy each other's company. One of the things we've done is to treat everybody the way we want to be treated, so as far as I'm concerned we're all equal in our office, no-one is more important than anyone else. If we can have a good laugh at someone's expense, it should be at everyone's expense and I'm not immune to that. They laugh at my expense from time to time. We've also done some extraordinary things as a group. For example, a couple of years ago we all went to Dreamworld to cuddle the tigers up there. When I started the business, I was very much aware that roughly four out of five businesses fail in the first five years. Of those that succeed, out of that one in

five, another four out of five fail in the second five years, and that's the government statistics. Sometimes that failure is because the business has closed, sometimes it's because it's gone broke, sometimes it's because the business has been sold, sometimes it's because the owner's had a gutful. They've worked, they've worked, they've worked, they've not had a holiday and they hit breaking point and just walk away from it. So when I started the business, I promised Sue and I promised myself that when we'd been going for 10 years, we'd do something extraordinary, and at that point I had no idea what it would be. But after we'd been going for about seven, we heard or saw something to do with the tigers in Dreamworld and we agreed that was it. So we took everybody up to Queensland for the weekend so that we could all experience that as a group. It did wonders for the team morale; it did wonders for our relationships with each

other to share an experience that was so awesome.

What keeps you awake at night?

Staff I suppose. The problems with people coming and going in our office. There's such an enormous shortage of accountants these days that a lot of accountants move on after a year or two because there are so many more opportunities for them, and often those opportunities present as the grass being greener, more money, more opportunity, sometimes to travel, that a small place like us may not necessarily match. But by and large, I sleep very well.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

Oh look, it would have to be my weight. I think it's a combination of sitting behind a desk 12 to 15 hours a day and having an enormous sweet tooth. It's dreadful. ■