

Losing is a winning move

AN award-winning weight loss concept with an innovative online component is now an even better business thanks to the Small Business Mentoring Service.

Dr Marlene Tham combined her extensive medical qualifications, including a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy training and Psychodynamic Therapy training with prize winning obesity research to create a weight loss clinic that really cares.

Melbourne Weight Loss (MWL) was created in 2005 and quickly became a leader in its field. Marlene, who also has a certificate in investment and finance and a diploma in technical analysis, was determined to use all her skills to create a compassionate and successful program.

MWL offers one-on-one medical consultations covering all facets of weight management including medical, diet, exercise and the emotional and psychological aspects of eating. Clients also have access to a unique and dynamic website linking them to the treating team 24 hours a day.

Food and exercise activities are logged, goals set, physical and metabolic progress analysed and graphed, and most importantly support and feedback offered at any time from anywhere in the world.



Based in the CBD, Melbourne Weight Loss has created a system which keeps patients motivated and supported 24/7, which Marlene says has not been achieved before. “Very few practices take on the burden of treating obesity, yet 80 per cent of the population will see their doctor in one year,” Marlene says.

“To our knowledge there are no medical practices in Victoria that specialise in weight management that incorporates a team of doctors, dieticians, exercise physiologists and

psychologists as a form of treatment. The e-health format of the interactive platform has not been done anywhere, ensuring that this is a highly specialist niche service.”

Always looking for ways to improve, Marlene felt she could use some help on the business side of her operation, which was the one area she did not feel adequately qualified. While she had extensive medical training, running a business was not covered in her studies.

Marlene discovered the SBMS when she was awarded a City of Melbourne Business Grant package which included SBMS mentoring. She was matched with Brenda Rossmann, an experienced business woman who has successfully led and developed several small businesses in the health and human resources fields.

The SBMS is a non-government, non-profit organisation of volunteer expert mentors who give their time and experience to help small business. It is supported by Small Business Victoria, which refers clients to it.

Marlene saw Brenda four times under the Business Acceleration Program, over 15 months and they are still in contact on a casual basis. Brenda advised Marlene on how to take MWL from a “caring” to a business mode. She helped with the important principles of running a business, such as:

- A business plan.
- A marketing plan.
- HR position descriptions and agreements.
- Networking and being seen.
- Preparing for the Telstra Business Awards

After seeing Brenda Marlene was able to improve her HR issues with minimal staff turnover. Profits improved by 15 per cent, sales by 20 per cent, new customers by 30 per cent and enquiries by 40 per cent. Marlene says with success has also come a happier and more productive workplace, with high patient satisfaction and success but just as importantly high staff satisfaction.

Brenda was also on hand afterwards when Marlene had any questions, which helped avoid costly mistakes. She encouraged Marlene to enter the Telstra Business Awards, in which MWL was a finalist in three 2009 categories. This added further credibility to the business.

Brenda is extremely proud of Marlene’s progress.

“The business has grown and consolidated with Marlene now thinking in business terms,” she says. “Coupled with her caring mode this gives her an advantage to grow her business.

Marlene says Brenda’s help was invaluable. “Having a mentor was especially important for me coming from a non-business and financial background,” she says. “In medicine they do not teach you how to run a business. Brenda ensured I had a business plan, taught me how to market and most importantly how to network.”

Brenda also helped inject some much-needed balance into Marlene’s life. “By learning how to delegate and train, the business has been able to grow and expand and has allowed me to have an excellent work/life balance and to start a new family,” Marlene says.

“There is no doubt that my business would not have expanded and grown without SBMS’s help. I now have the confidence in how to market, network and promote. It allowed me to think like a business woman instead of just a doctor and to be able to expand out if the normal medical

pathway that most doctors take. There is no doubt ... Brenda played a large contribution to my success with being a finalist for three categories in the Telstra Business Woman Awards.”

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