

BALANCING BUSINESS WITH LIFESTYLE

# HER BUSINESS

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## Keran Wicks

NETWORK VIDEO

Keran Wicks is the founder & Managing Director of Network Video, which celebrates its 12th anniversary this year. She tells *Herbusiness* about her management strategies and how she has grown the business.

**1. Could you please give us a quick timeline of your life to date?** I was born in Sydney, then moved to Melbourne. I left school, worked, married, started a business, had my first son and continued to work to grow the business. Then I remarried, kept working, had another son, started Network Video, and just kept on going.

**2. How old are you now?** Forty Five.

**3. Are you married?** Now separated.

**4. Children?** (if so, how many and ages)  
I have two sons, aged 20 & 14.

**5. When did you start in the business you are in now?** In October 1993. We will be celebrating our 12th anniversary this year. That we are not only surviving, but thriving, is testament to our creed that "we live or die by our performance", as the rationalisation of the industry in recent years has seen many fall by the wayside.

**6. What businesses are you in now?**  
Network Video. It has grown and evolved a lot as the industry has changed.

**7. Why did you want to work in this business?** I didn't really choose to be in the entertainment industry; I fell into it, needing a job after being sacked at 24 years of age from a retail management position for being pregnant. I started working part time in a video library and, after the birth of my son, I thought there might be an opportunity selling movies to other video stores. I was right, and started selling movies from the boot of my car for a year or so before opening my first wholesale movie warehouse.

**8. How many hours do you work a week?**  
Approx 60 hours a week. Emails at 3am aren't work. They're inspired compulsion.

**9. What did you do that worked to get this business where it is now?** I believed in it, kept driving it, worked hard, and thought outside the square. I got to know my competitors and their offerings well, and made sure our offering was unique in the market place. Being in a totally male dominated industry, I also made sure that I wasn't regarded as some prissy female, by getting heavily involved in the industry associations so I could have some input into the bigger picture issues and do more than just have opinions. I did the work to back it up.

**10. What did you do that didn't work?** Try to change my management style.

**11. How did and do you oversee expansion of your business?** In great detail. I am a natural control freak.

**12. How do you spend a typical day in the business?** I am lucky as it varies; when I am in the office I spend the days focusing on the internal operations of the business, liaising with department managers and staff, and co-ordinating advertising and planning strategies for the coming months. I travel often, meeting with suppliers and negotiating for Network Video members. I meet often, too, with Network storeowners, ensuring they are making the most of their business and the products and services we provide from HQ.

**13. Do you have any growth objectives for the next 5 years and how will you reach them?** I have never been one for setting specific objectives or budgets etc. Having said that, we have achieved growth year-on-year for 11 years. This business moves so quickly that planning too far ahead is almost a waste of time; by the time you finish the plan, the landscape has changed. Our growth comes about by reacting quickly to the marketplace and needs of our members, being able to make the most of all opportunities as they arise. Understanding the bigger picture of the home entertainment industry is better for my business than all the planning in the world. I really do believe that you make many of your own opportunities and, to do this, you need to be able to move quickly by not being committed to a single course of action.

**14. What is your strategy when it comes to employing and managing staff?** I don't place a lot of emphasis on references

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or degrees; I believe you can tell a lot about a person by spending a little more time talking with them at an interview or, if required, even a second interview. I also believe in promoting from within; the majority of the management team started work at Network Video in junior positions and have been moved into various divisions as their individual skill sets became obvious. As for managing staff, I have an open door policy and encourage all staff to feel free to talk to me if needed and mostly they do. I am brutally honest with staff and believe in open communication. I don't stand on ceremony, but I do insist on loyalty. I like to think I lead by example and don't expect staff to do anything I wouldn't do myself. I won't accept less than any person's best; if they show me what they are capable of, that's what I expect all the time. But, on the other hand, I don't expect

more than they are capable of either, so there is some form of balance.

**15. What are your top 5 tips for other women in business?**

I have six that I absolutely swear by:

1. Follow your instincts; in the long run they will be right.
2. Find your own management style and believe in it.
3. Know enough about every area of the business so that you could step in and run any area if required; that way you can see the total business from an overall perspective and actively work with every person in the business with an understanding of their roles.
4. Value honesty and loyalty from employees, over ability.
5. Don't be a dry cleaner, "all care and no responsibility". Accept that there will be problems, and when there are, own them, fix them as best you can and move on.
6. Make decisions. I find the wrong decision is normally better than no decision and letting an issue fester. If you have to, don't be embarrassed to go back and change anything that needs to be changed. Nothing is ever set in concrete. Remember that (unless you're a doctor) no one is going to die, it is never ever as bad as you think it's going to be. It will all come clean in the wash.

**20. Where do you get your inspiration from?**

It feels so good when it all works, when you get it right. When you make the decision that turns out to be the right one at the right time, it's like a drug and knowing I could do it once inspires me to do it again and again. Luckily, most of the time I love what I do and believe in the business philosophically.