

Lynette Mayne was a chief executive with Lend Lease until she decided to build her own business, Work Wear World.

Mayne started the work apparel supplier with her husband Stuart Hornery and has grown the business to a turnover of \$10 million a year.

Hornery passed away last year and Mayne continues as the founder and executive chair of Work Wear World and as an ambassador for the Australian Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Mayne tells Women's Agenda sister publication SmartCompany that Work Wear World shook up the existing work apparel model by providing sizing kits to the businesses which were its customers.

This meant employees could try on the gear while on site and businesses could have the kits as long as they wanted.

It's a David and Goliath story.

We provide uniforms and work wear to the major companies of Australia and we have an absolute blue chip customer base that includes DHL, Toll and CSR.

Many people said we couldn't do it. But I didn't listen, which is normal for me.

At the beginning, Goliath had lots of salespeople and branches across the country. We're an SME so there was no way we could afford to do that.

What we did was some research and asked what businesses didn't like about that. They said they didn't like that employees had to leave the site to try on gear and they didn't like the local branches which never had decision makers or stock. So we said ok we will do something different.

We are innovative in everything we do. We dare our employees to be different.

It was very important to me for the employees to feel like they are owners like I am. So I give the employees 25% of the profit each year. They don't have to earn it, they are given it.

Every employee, whether working in the warehouse or anywhere else, gets all the information about the company, including financials.

We are probably the only company in Australia that has a female majority on the board, in the executive team and of employees. In fact, I've got a confession to make – we don't have enough males in our company.

Service is unbelievably important to us. Our aim is to be the best supplier of anything our companies procure. So that means our slogan is: We are going to service our customers to death.

We were the first to use safety colours, the bright yellow and orange. That was a real risk because it was in the late 90s. We became experts but we learnt the hard way.

We also decided that we would become the employee advocate, that we would not provide gear that employees were going to be uncomfortable with. Others were touting that micromesh was a great product. It looked fantastic, but it was 100% polyester and you sweat in it so we were not prepared to offer that until we developed a product from another industry with a cotton backing.

It was very important for us to pass the safety standards test so we would get all of our gear passed by CSIRO.

We publish our certificates on our website. 'Publish or perish', was another motto.

Technology was really important to us as an SME we wanted to come up with a unique model where we could put a major customer on our books without having to put a whole lot of extra people on because we couldn't afford to do it. So our technology has always been the best and our clients get us to prototype it.

Our suppliers are our partners. We looked after them when everyone else wasn't looking after them. We stayed with them and now they really look after us.

We are unbelievably selective in terms of the tenders we go after. We only go after tenders where we think we can add a huge amount of value.

For me, it's not about winning tenders; it's about having a group of amazing employees that together can do something they could never, ever do on their own. It's not about the individual; it's about the company and the culture.

We only take on one or two major customers a year so we really can service our customers to death.

We always give our clients what they ask for. DHL said please tender on this gear and had a corporate design and corporate colour. We gave them that, but recommended they slightly change the colour to a brighter orange so it will meet Australian safety standards. They said that is one of the reasons they gave us the tender. We are extremely flexible in the way we go about things.