

The following article by Guy Mosel, featuring our office band, The Bottom Line, appeared in the Courier Mail on Tuesday, 11th May, 2004.

Staff teamwork is an art

Guy Mosel finds that the office that bands together can make beautiful music in the corporate world, too

ACCOUNTANTS and rock bands — it's not the sort of word association that readily leaps to mind. But to Paul Fiumara, managing partner of Brisbane's Hirn Newey - DFK Chartered Accountants, it makes perfect sense.

"There's a strong relationship between accounting, mathematics and music," he says.

"They're all very logical things. I realised a few years ago that a lot of accountants play some sort of musical instrument."

And so The Bottom Line, a classic rock band, was born. Featuring Fiumara on lead guitar and four other Hirn Newey staff, the band now plays at parties and events organised by staff and friends.

Hirn Newey's white collars with musical alter-egos are part of an expanding community of corporate types with artistic passions.

Among them is Domino's Pizza boss Don Meij, who is a wood sculptor and actively encourages Domino's staff to explore their creative talents.

Property developers Usher Powell Development decorated their new Gold Coast offices with artwork made by their staff.

Fiumara, 42, says he has noticed a growing trend in firms promoting artistic endeavour.

"I think there's certainly a desire by businesses to encourage participation by staff in a range of 'non-work' activities," he says. "Traditionally, firms have focused a lot on sports, like corporate team events, triathlons and the Bridge to Brisbane run. That's always been popular.

"I think moving into the arts is a relatively new thing. But there's certainly a lot of interest."



Fiumara says he was inspired to form the band when he realised his staff were keen to know more about each other outside of the office environment.

"We found that by forming and playing in the band, enthusiasm and bonding in the office increased. It took away a lot of barriers between the partners, other accountants and the support staff," he says.

"On our Intranet we have pictures of the band and there are photos around the office, too."

Dr Remi Ayoko, of the University of Queensland faculty of business, economics and law, says her research into team culture in the workplace found time spent together socially was rated very highly by staff.

"Things they do together — eating, socialising, doing stuff together on Fridays — it means a lot to staff," Ayoko says. "It breaks down the barriers between them in communication."

Ayoko says having an office-based band might help staff feel more involved in the life of the business.



DRAWING on his experience ...architect Shane Thompson, above, and, below from left, The Bottom Line members John Barrett, Cameron Kelly, Paul Fiumara, Gavin Johns and Jessica Jakeman.

Main Picture: David Kelly

"For those people involved in the band they may feel it's a way of identifying themselves with their profession. It is a way of identifying and belonging and that leads to more commitment in the workplace."

Queensland principal of architectural and interior design firm Bligh Voller Nield, Shane Thompson, says the line between his profession and art is much finer than in most other professions.

But Thompson says his art has developed into something quite different to the kind of drawing and design he does in his job.

"I've been interested in art generally since I was an architecture student," he says.

"As architecture students we are taught painting and drawing, and we learn how to colour in sketches. This was before the age of computers. It's a fairly short step from there to pursuing art.

"My drawing has become more of an abstract thing now and has much less to do with my architecture than it used to."

Thompson says his art — which has appeared in several group and solo exhibitions — allows him to keep in touch with the creative, risk-taking element of his personality without the restraints of deadlines and planning approval.

"I don't have to worry about my art falling over and killing someone."

He says the firm encourages its staff to take an interest in contemporary art and he counts a painter, piano player and a few dancers among his employees.

The firm also has a strategic creative alliance with Brisbane theatre company the Frank Theatre Group.

"We support them a little bit financially and assisting them in the design of their productions, and they come in and do voice training and show us how to present to clients. After all, when we present it is a bit of theatre."

Ayoko says allowing people to express themselves artistically within a workplace may give staff a sense of ownership of their office and job.

But she warns that a workplace that's too cohesive and relaxed can result in homogeneity and may stifle originality and critical thinking.