

Single mum, multiple skills!



How did single mum Donna Tromans GBII get the courage and skills to take on her own 'challenging' tenancy? By taking the Profitable Business Portfolio (PBP). Tim Palmer ABII reports

Donna Tromans GBII, 41, took on the Union Pub Company tenancy at the Labour in Vain, Stourbridge in March this year. She'd spent 15 years working behind bars, five of those in a managerial role as steward at the local rugby club.

Having completed seven modules of the BIIAB Profitable Business Portfolio (PBP) she's possibly the first person who has successfully obtained the BIIAB Level 3 Diploma in Licensed Hospitality and gone on to take her own pub, quite a challenge as she's also parent to Luke, aged 13.

It would be understating it to call the Labour in Vain a 'challenge'. Let's say local police were 'aware' of it and alcohol wasn't the only mind-altering substance imbibed on and around the premises, insists Donna. The kitchen was condemned and cleaning the place took six weeks, three of which Donna decided to close completely.

She's taking a zero-tolerance approach to disorder. The reopened pub has a ban on baseball caps and a strict 'No under-21s' policy which effectively meant starting from scratch, says Donna, as it wiped out all existing trade. After just two months the pub's trading at £3,500 weekly with plenty more to come.

Taking seven PBP modules means she's more equipped than many to go it alone.

Motivating your team

Taking Unit 3 of the PBP made Donna realise she has a democratic rather than autocratic or 'laissez-faire' leadership style. Leaders adopting this style like to involve the team in decision making, while still retaining control.

There's a higher level of participation than the other styles, with more group discussion and team input and the team are generally allowed to direct themselves with guidance from the leader. Donna was lucky in that as the pub was effectively closed when she took over she was able to bring her own team of seven 'gorgeous

girls' mainly aged 18-24 to work with her, all have been with her in some capacity for at least two years.

She says: "I like the idea of empowering staff to come up with their own ideas. One of the very first was to hold a monthly fancy dress night where initially they dressed up as builders, the schoolgirl theme in the second month certainly brought the lads in, as I expect the next cowgirls and indians will. If the pub gets a reputation for well-behaved, fit young men, we're going to attract women and it becomes self-perpetuating and the business as a whole will benefit.

Great customer service

Donna says, "The most important thing about service is to deliver to customers in a consistent and efficient way, for example, eye contact with customers, drinks presentation, even regular ashtray cleaning, and I monitor it regularly to ensure this happens. It's just little things mainly but they mean a lot to customers. Asking for staff input when setting service standards also helps a lot and again gives them some ownership of the business."

Get staff to multi-task

There's another link here with the Training Design & Delivery unit of the PBP and Donna says her attitude to training has totally changed since her club steward days. "Then I didn't really trust anyone to do anything like line cleaning or changing cellar gases." At the Labour in Vain she wants all her team capable of all the jobs in the pub and rather than what she calls the 'formal flip chart' method of instruction, has adopted an on-the-job approach more suited to a new, busy, customer-facing business.

"So far we've only had one wrong drink served so I know we're doing something right and keeping wastage to a minimum.

As for getting them to pull pints properly I just removed the drip trays for a while – no way are they going to get beer on their nice new shoes and trainers."

New merchandising skills

The Merchandising & Selling module of the PBP told her that 60% of customers don't know what they're going to drink when approaching the bar, so she's been helping them make up their minds using skilled point of sale techniques contained in the PBP.

"Customers often approach the bar in a certain direction and arrive at the same point to be served – the point of contact – which is a powerful place for merchandising displays," Donna says. "I've also put products, most recently SIRRUS and Magners ciders, in the prime selling positions called 'hot spots' – the main routes to and at the point of contact – where customers are most likely to be influenced into a purchase decision."

Other techniques used have been mass facings where two or more of the same product are grouped together to draw attention to it; popular spirits such as gin and vodka placed on the right side of the Optic display with the Malibus and the like on the left and also keeping display fridges fully stocked have also helped sales. "I'll be using 'A' boards outside the pub to highlight the new food offer too."

Free publicity

Local papers have also been running 'Women doing it for themselves' type stories once they picked up on Donna's single parent status meaning more free local coverage.

Taking on the pub was a challenge, and Donna was advised by several very experienced licensees not to touch it but two months down the line the pub is running well as more customers realise it is now a clean, friendly and safe environment.

She says: "We've had no trouble, and feedback from customers has been excellent from the moment they walk in and see a clean bright environment instead of the dingy surroundings of before.

"Understandably, the immediate neighbours, who've been used to having empty cans and worse thrown into their gardens, will be the last to be convinced but I'm building a rapport with them."

Donna adds: "A friend's teenage daughter has developed a really good brochure for us highlighting socially responsible things like the CCTV in the car park and we'll shortly do a local mail drop. I'm looking forward to the future."

For details of the Profitable Business Portfolio and other BIIAB qualifications that will support your professional success please visit www.biiab.org which also lists your nearest accredited trainers

LICENSEE Q&A



Angela Scott is joint lessee at Punch Taverns' Masons Arms, West Rainton, Co Durham with husband Alan, a GBII

If I wasn't doing this as a career I'd love to have been an archaeologist

The three best ideas I've brought to the business recently have been

1) The only takeaway in the village is a Chinese so we introduced takeaway pizzas in the pub and it's been great for business. Unsurprisingly it's usually the men who volunteer to come and get them and grab a sneaky pint or two

2) We arrange trips out for the old people in the village, usually to a nearby resort called Seahouses. We call ahead and tell the pubs we're coming and they usually put on some beer for the old folk. It's giving something back to the community

3) We've been here just over a year and the drinks offer was very limited so we've introduced a lot of variety and instead of having, say, just a house vodka, we've introduced some top brands and people are willing to pay extra for them despite it being quite a low-income area

My biggest mistake was not buying a freehold pub which we could have done

I'm most proud of how we've turned the pub around despite loads of problems. I hadn't pulled a pint before we took this on and now we get people driving quite a distance to come to us, particularly for the quality of our ales

My business is distinguished from others in our locality by keeping trouble out. We're a safe environment

I'm inspired by single mothers who work extremely hard and bring up kids at the same time. I've been there

If customers were to criticise my business at the moment it would be we badly need a refurbishment

My biggest fault is it doesn't sound a fault but I never give in. I've got a bad back but don't let it stop me doing anything which I suppose could land me in hospital one day

My redeeming feature is I'm a very calm person and never shout

You wouldn't think it, but I enjoy to be honest, I'm such a yapper in the pub there's nothing that anyone doesn't know about me!

I relax by I love going to Seahouses, even seeing the signs to it along the A1 chill me out

My luxury is going once a week to the local beauty parlour and having a massage or reflexology, it's heaven!

If I won the Lottery I'd look after my family and buy a big house at Seahouses and one in the country.