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THE INTERVIEW:
Guy Picken



Guy Picken

From Rugby League star to managing director of an electrical supplies distributor. Guy Picken talks about his transition into the electrical industry.

You were a Rugby League player for the Cronulla Sharks and the St George Dragons. How did you go from being a footy player to the managing director of a leading distributor of electrical supplies?

I am asked this question a lot. I put most of what I have achieved in life down to what I learned playing football. I was lucky enough to have had some terrific mentors during my time in Rugby League, namely Brian Smith and the late Jack Gibson. The lessons I learned were as much about life as football. The biggest take-away from sport is that there are no excuses. You can have the best reason in the world for a bad

performance but you will be telling it to the second grade coach. So the marketing people at Nike summed it up ... "Just do it".

Tell us about your transition into the electrical industry.

I started as a sales representative for *John R Turk* and as I was a footballer it was reasonably easy to gain new business. *John R Turk* was relatively small in those days and all the people there were like a family. They made it easy to fit in and interestingly many are still there today. My journey to managing director was progressive and I have filled almost every

role in the organisation on the way through, so no one step was overwhelming.

Did you have prior training in management or experience in the electrical trade?

When I left school I did a traineeship with a company called *STC* - now *Alcatel* - who sold telephone exchanges. I gained a Diploma in Electrical Engineering. I have done Management and Marketing Certificates while I was working my way through the ranks at *John R Turk*.

What are some day-to-day tasks and responsibilities as the managing director of Rexel Holdings?

Some of my core roles are ensuring that we have the best quality senior managers in all our support functions and leaders in all our trading divisions. It is my responsibility to guide the strategy including the investment strategy of the group with the customer the central focus of our strategies. I also have to ensure our businesses are led in such a way that we have the best people, simple structures, simple procedures and clear directions.

How do you like working in the electrical industry compared with your Rugby League days?

I have been very fortunate in that I got to live the dream of many boys by playing sport professionally. When that career came to an end I was again lucky to find an industry and a job I love. People in this industry like to complain about it but from what I have seen many ordinary people have been able to earn very good livings through hard work. It is also an industry where we have a lot of fun.

What are some of the major differences in careers that you have had to get used to?

Sport is much more about living in the moment. In business most significant achievements are the results of long term planning and the efforts of others. In tough environments you can't improve the result with one good run or tackle. In football, if you don't like the score you can do something about it that very minute. In a similar vein, in business your performance is assessed over a longer period of time. Sport is probably the only profession where you can be fired for one bad day or become immortal for a great one.

What did your Rugby League mates say when they found out about your decision to join the electrical industry?

I joined the industry before I gave up football. In those days there were a few of us in the electrical industry. When I was at *St. George* four of us worked in the industry. Brad Mackay and Peter Gill also worked for us at *John R Turk* and Mick Potter worked for *Lawrence and Hanson*.

Do you have any regrets in giving up Rugby League to move into the electrical industry full-time?

It isn't like I had the option of staying 25 forever. Rock stars can stumble along into their 60s trading on their name. Sportsmen are totally reliant on performance as it is measurable on a daily basis. I do wish I was 25 again and in my physical prime but I am not the type to spend time living in the past. One door shut and another one opened and it opened into a very good place.

Do you still play, and do you miss playing the sport professionally?

No I am too old to play now even if I wanted to. When I retired it was due to a serious knee injury. It was my choice to retire as I had a contract available but I knew I couldn't play at the standard of previous years. I never want to go backwards.

What do you miss the most about your football days?

What I miss most about it is the one-on-one contest. You had an opposite number you had to defeat either physically, mentally or both. There is a winner on the day not only of the game but in that personal contest.

What do you think of your son following in your footsteps to become a footy player?

My son is a pretty good footballer, much better than I was, but he doesn't see any other career except football. I am trying



to convince him of the need for education but he can't see it. I asked him what would happen if he suffered a bad leg injury. He told me he would become a professional golfer. I then asked what he would do if the injury was so bad he couldn't be a professional golfer. He told me if it was *that* bad he would just get a job like mine.

Guy Picken is the managing director for *Rexel Holdings Australia*, and a former Rugby League player from 1986 to 1992, where he played for the *Cronulla Sharks* and the *St George Dragons*.



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