

From teaspoons to CEO

Brendan Owens celebrates 20 years at the Y!

When Brendan Owens started working as a receptionist at Auckland's iconic Tepid Baths, he never imagined his part-time job would turn into a 20-year career at the YMCA. Studying for a sport and recreation degree at AUT on a rugby scholarship, working from 5:30am to 8:30am fitted well into his busy schedule. Some of the lessons he learned in those first few years have served him throughout his career.

"My first job title was Receptionist, but my unofficial title was Manager of Teaspoons," says Brendan. "The dishwasher didn't work very well, so I was to buff them to make sure each cup of coffee had a shiny teaspoon sitting next to it. As simple as it sounds, I learned that everyone likes a title, a project and responsibility. It was with these humble beginnings, I grew my value of customer service learning from my first CEO, John Fairhurst. John was a tough ex-Army kind of guy, he valued the input from every individual; he insisted on knowing everybody's name, I admired that about him."

Three concussions in six months put an end to a career in professional rugby, but Brendan worked to execute his plan B, with two bachelor's degrees and having been promoted at 'The Teps'. He soon moved into the assistant manager role at YMCA North Shore, where he won a competition that took him to Sydney for an international fitness conference. While in Australia for the conference, Brendan was interviewed at the newly opened Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre in Darling Harbour, a huge YMCA-managed centre with 150 staff and annual turnover of \$10 million. He was offered the role of Customer Service Coordinator and within two weeks he had packed his bags and moved to Sydney.

"When I jumped on the plane, I had a feeling that the job would take me places," he says. "Within six months I was promoted to a site on the other side of the city as the Centre Manager. Following a few extra projects, I was promoted to General Manager of Recreation across 65 centres throughout New South Wales. This was a feat - with a team of over 3,000 and an annual turnover of \$80 million a year. The learning was steep, but we all saw quite a bit of growth in that time!"

Not only has Brendan's whole career been tied up with the YMCA, it is also how he met his fiancée, Peta. She also had a lengthy career with YMCA and their shared passion for community and health and fitness saw a busy five years working together in Sydney. In 2014, Brendan and his young family moved back to New Zealand, with new positions and a new baby on the way, Brendan continued to grow as a leader and influencer at the Y. When the CEO role came up at YMCA Greater Wellington, Peta and Brendan decided Wellington would be the perfect compromise between Southland, where Peta's family is based, and Auckland; a new challenge for them both.

Now Brendan has reached 20 years at the YMCA, the shine still hasn't worn off. Brendan loves the people he works with, and the community surrounding the Y. He continues to model his values daily and leads his team to breathe the Y values like 'strong families' in the everyday working environment. He says anyone who starts out working for the Y today, even as a part-time 'Manager of Teaspoons', can achieve great things.

"There are so many opportunities for people at the Y," he says. "It's all about taking those opportunities, and maybe creating your own breaks a bit too. You might have to work hard and get noticed - the door might be ajar, but you've got to push it open. You've just got to take the leap!"

