

Striving for success

James Bilius has prospered by looking at the work practices of people around him, from his father in the family pizza shop to his current-day clients.

by Chris Pritchard

Whatever happened to our work ethic? Accountant James Bilius says the importance of hard work – even of working up a sweat – is a value all parents should instil in children. “Teach them young and it’ll become a part of who they are.”

Too many people, in this 36-year-old accountant’s opinion, “expect to receive everything on a plate” without striving for achievement. “If I’ve got a motto, it’s ‘you get nothing for nothing.’”

Bilius is the principal of Bilius and Associates, which has clients in both Melbourne and Sydney. He lives in Melbourne’s Lower Templestowe with wife Joanne and baby Stella. And when it comes to hard work, he knows what he’s talking about.

“My parents were Greek migrants who arrived in Australia with no education, no skills and no money,” says Bilius. “As a small kid, I’d watch them work 15 hours a day, seven days a week in their takeaway shop – just to support the family and pay their bills. They never complained – it’s what they did. Later, my dad ran a pizza shop. I was old enough to help, watching how incredibly hard he worked for a small profit. Even then, I admired his work ethic.”

This hard-work outlook, ingrained in Bilius’ make-up, was put to good use when he opted to become an accountant. Having enrolled at age 19 at the University of Western Sydney, he earned a Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in accountancy. While a part-time student, he also worked full-time for a firm of accountants. When he switched to full-time studies, he made his job part-time. “The academic course was extremely valuable,” he says, “but I learned plenty in the accountancy office.”

Bilius chose accountancy after “pondering various options and deciding this was something I’d be good at. I’ve always been interested in investments, saving money and discovering how businesses work.”

Many of his clients work in security-providing businesses, construction, the medical profession and he also works with “a cross-section of mum-and-dad businesses”. He agrees clients often choose accountants after hearing other clients in the same business or profession are on the books. “They know you’re familiar with the activity and have acquired knowledge and expertise.”

While this is undoubtedly true and helps Bilius build his client base, he also explores new fields. “It’s natural curiosity,” he explains. “I’m always keen to learn what makes unfamiliar businesses tick.”

His advice to young people considering an accountancy career: “Don’t be put off by people who tell you accountancy is boring – it isn’t, and there’s always something new to discover. It provides opportunities to build on your strengths and develop in areas that interest you, with the scope to diversify into new areas you’d like to investigate. Overall, you have to be interested in business – and how businesses work. You get to know your clients’ operations inside out.”

IPA membership is highly valuable, he says, “to ascertain what’s new in the profession and use this knowledge to help clients”.

As a hobby, Bilius likes to restore old cars. He particularly likes Fords and Holdens, currently owning two Fords: a 1972 Falcon XA and a 1974 Falcon XB. “No, I don’t drive them to visit clients,” he says with a laugh. “But I’m quite involved in fundraisers and other events, particularly for children’s charities. Automotive days raise money but are also a way to meet people with a fondness for the same vehicles.”

While he loves being an accountant and believes “everyone should have a passion for work,” he maintains that car restoration takes his mind completely off the job. “It’s a way to lose myself, to get my head around something totally different,” he says. “It’s important to be able to escape briefly, no matter how much you like what you do.”



Name:

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Company:

Bilius and Associates

Position: Principal

IPA status: FIPA

Age: 36

Location: Melbourne