

THE SWITCH

From lawyer to resort manager

Growing up on remote Lord Howe Island, a two-hour flight east of Sydney in the middle of the Tasman Sea, Dani Rourke had a childhood most would envy.

"In those days, at Lord Howe there were no phones at home. I'd never even worn shoes to school," she says.

Although the Lord Howe resort Pinetrees Lodge had been in her family for six generations, Rourke left island life early.

"I went to boarding school in Sydney in grade 6. It was a bit of a shock," she says.

When it came time to choose a career, she had no desire to move back to the casual environment of her youth.

"I became a lawyer, working mainly in employment and industrial relations law," she says.

Rourke soon discovered she had selected the right area of her field.

"I grew up in a small business so employment law made sense to me. It's very practical," she says.

Her day-to-day tasks also reminded her just how lucky lawyers are in the workplace.

"You are valued more as you get older and wiser rather than less. You are respected and you have a comfortable workplace," she says.

Having divided her career between a role in private practice and a long stint as an in-house lawyer for IBM, Rourke learnt firsthand where her strengths lay.

"I'm not naturally a fighter, I'm more of a sorter-out of problems, so in that sense I wasn't that well suited [to private practice]," she says. "Working in-house for IBM was better. I had one client and it was easier to prioritise."

When her mother was diagnosed with cancer and became

unable to continue her role in the family business, Rourke and her family decided to move back to Lord Howe Island. She's now one of four executive managers of Pinetrees and is ensconced in the world of hospitality.

The 85-bed lodge provides full board for guests, many of whom have been visiting Pinetrees Lodge for decades.

"Lots of our guests have been many times; it's one of the nicest things about being here," she says of life 600 kilometres off the east coast.

Rourke's own day starts about 9am, after an early start with her two young children.

"I look after guests and talk about what they might do for the day. People need suggestions about activities and exploring and part of our service is to pack them a barbecue lunch – we tell them which beach to visit and where the wind is offshore," she says.

Office work and staffing fill up Rourke's morning and after lunch she does the airport run before taking a break.

"It's a broken day but we have a lovely time [with our kids] in the afternoon. I go back to work about 5.30-6pm and stay until after dinner service," she says.

While the flexibility of working for family helps when things come up with the kids, Rourke says the clients make the real difference between her two careers.

"In the law you deal with a lot of very stressed, unhappy people," she says. "[Here] you're often looking after people during the best week of their year. When you drive them to the airport at the end of the week they get out and kiss you!"

SUE WHITE



THEN

NOW

SALARY \$160,000 (pro rata).

WORK-LIFE BALANCE "The law gets bad press but it wasn't too bad. In private practice there's not much work-life balance but at IBM I had a part-time job-share role, which was fantastic."
HOURS "Notionally it was nine to five but as you're dealing with people in different parts of world, there were often calls at 10pm, which you could do from home."



Return to paradise ... Dani Rourke left a life in law (above) to help run her family's Lord Howe Island resort (top).

SALARY \$50,000. "There's a profit share so if things go well I'll do better."

WORK-LIFE BALANCE "Family businesses are ideal for work-life balance because it's expected your kids are important to you. If you need to take them along, you can – in fact, people are happy to see them."

HOURS 50 hours-plus. "I get a couple of days off a week, never on a weekend as they're our busiest days."

MISS "Sometimes I miss just being an employee and going home at the end of the day and forgetting it. Also, there's no IT department to deal with your internet problems."

CHALLENGES "Isolation is a big one. You can't just get someone in to fix things, or go to the shops."

LINK
pinetrees.com.au

MyCareer
mycareer.com.au

For salary advice, see
mycareer.com.au/salary-centre.