



## LEGAL EAGLE

Travis Schultz

# Workaholic culture may haunt our future

**T**HERE is more than just anecdotal evidence that Australians are amongst the hardest working cultures in the developed world.

A recent OECD report considered 30 democracies and found that Australians spent the least time entertaining friends, take less recreational leave than most, and work longer hours than many of our counterparts.

And the first casualty of our "workaholicism" could well be our national identity as a happy-go-lucky bunch of "knockabouts".

With changes (I deliberately avoid use of the word "advances") in technology, our Australian workforce is constantly accessible and, it seems, constantly working.

We wear our long hours like a badge of honour, yet we often let our relationships and home life suffer.

It is probably only a matter of time before this social issue becomes a legal one.

At what point will we realise the human cost of burnouts, breakdowns and emotional injury?

At what point in time will the social cost of our work ethic result in a legal response by way of legislation, government education or a common law obligation on employers to manage the burnout risk?

But then again, maybe we are expected to become a land of workaholics so we can eventually pay off the budget deficit!

Travis Schultz is managing partner of Schultz Toomey O'Brien. Ph: 5413 8925.

# Looking at bright side

FROM PAGE 17

KAY, 58, a former manager of community services who had been in council positions for 11 years, admitted that she was taken aback by her redundancy, even though amalgamation had meant it was always on the cards.

"A good thing is that if you do know about it, then you can plan for it and get yourself in the right frame of mind, which I did," she said.

Kay has turned what might have been a negative into a positive, and treated her enforced break from the workforce as an opportunity to nourish body and soul, regain balance in her life, educate herself and reconsider her future direction.

"Things happen. I take the best from this. You can't change it.

"This is my opportunity to sit back and ask, 'What do I want to do?' and I can concentrate on me a little bit," she said.

Kay, who divides her time between Maroochydore and Brisbane, where her husband works, said she was open to whatever opportunities were presented to her, and believed a positive attitude would work in her favour.

"You do get your negatives but you've got to fight them.

"I could wallow, but what good is it going to do me?" she said.

Shannon Thwaites, 39, described redundancy as the best thing that ever happened to her, even though it was a shock at the time.

Shannon and her husband both lost their jobs when Roam Free on the Gold Coast made more than 50 employees redundant.

She said they were fortunate that years of hard work meant they were financially secure enough to enjoy the initial break from work, but she had also needed time to recover from the redundancy.

Shannon has since started a website, [www.discover-sunshine-coast-australia.com](http://www.discover-sunshine-coast-australia.com), promoting the Sunshine Coast as a tourist destination, which allows her to work part-time from home.

Alma Lawson was forced to change careers not through redundancy, but ill health.

Alma, 62, of Beerwah, was part way through training as a dental assistant when a major operation,



**NEW PATHS:** Alma Lawson was forced to find a new work direction because of ill health, but is looking forward to what the future holds.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

After years as a full-time working mother, she enjoys being on hand for her two sons before and after school, being able to sit down as a family and eat a decent meal at night, and not having to sit up until 1am catching up on work.

Shannon said redundancy had forced her to reassess her priorities in life.

"Really, if that's the worst thing that can happen to us, it's great, because it's given us an opportunity to turn our lives around," she said.

Alma Lawson was forced to change careers not through redundancy, but ill health.

Alma, 62, of Beerwah, was part way through training as a dental assistant when a major operation,

followed by deep vein thrombosis, meant that she could not continue such stationary work.

She decided to study a retail certificate at TAFE and picked up part-time work with a Maroochydore gift store, The Very Thing, before she even finished her course, but will again be looking for work within the month when the business closes.

Alma, whose varied working life has included small business and sales, is approaching unemployment without fear and is confident of gaining a job.

"You've got to get out there and make every day count. The older you get, the more you really do have to consider that," she said.



**FAMILY FIRST:** Shannon Thwaites enjoys more time with her two sons after being made redundant.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

## Ethical investment seminar will help finances go green

**A** SEMINAR on ethical investment and climate change will be held at Maleny this Thursday evening.

The seminar, at the Tranquil Park Resort, will be hosted by James Thier, executive director of Australian Ethical Investment, and Karen McLeod, a fi-

nancial planner with Ethical Investment Advisers.

Mr Thier said ethical investment was about making positive change for climate change and other environmental and social issues, by investing in responsible and sustainable projects and industries.

"Ethical investment is

about making sure you know what your money is doing.

"If you're making personal efforts to reduce your water and energy use, taking public transport, and recycling, then your money should be working to make a positive difference, too," he said.

Ms McLeod acknowledged that investors often had difficulty choosing ethical investments.

"We help investors decide," she said.

"We discuss both their financial needs and ethical values, bringing to light the investment areas that clients wish to avoid or

support, then, drawing on comprehensive ethical and financial research, we advise which investments are suitable."

Bookings for the ethical investment and climate change seminar, which will run from 6.15pm to 7.30pm, can be made by calling 3876 2377.

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