

## **WENDY AND ROXI KENNY**

There are always similarities between any mother and daughter such as looks, personality and mannerisms. Wendy and Roxi Kenny are similar in a way unique to the mother-daughter bond by their careers in the refrigeration and air conditioning industry.

Although Wendy is Managing Director and Roxi works in accounts at their family-owned, Queensland-based business, Air-Rite Mechanical Services, their careers in the RAC industry started in a similar fashion—a need for a receptionist.

At 16, Wendy was at a crossroads, she had to choose between getting a job or going back to school after finishing year 10. Fate intervened in the form of her electrician friend who informed her that his boss at Diamond Air Conditioning, John Urch, was looking for a secretary.

As Wendy was being shown the secretarial ropes by John's wife, Nancy, John took it upon himself to teach her the ins-and-outs of the RAC industry.

“John was fantastic. He taught me how to do heat load calculations and how air conditioning worked as he also had a manufacturing plant.

“I was also lucky to visit some sites, the safety issues were not as strict as they are now. Verbal communication was very important and the paperwork trail was definitely not as it is today, things could be done on a handshake.”

Even though Wendy considered herself lucky to visit sites and gained a lot of experience on the job, she eventually realised she needed formal industry training. Over the course of her career, which spans almost 40 years, she has completed a course in management skills for trade contractors, gained a Diploma of Engineering Technology (Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning), gained a NSW Contractors Licence, and is currently studying to gain her law degree.

As Wendy progressed on her educational journey, she also progressed on the job. From junior office girl, Wendy went on to work as a private secretary at John's private company, before moving to Brisbane with her husband, Alistair, and working at Uniflex. She was eventually asked to run Air-Rite Mechanical Services by her former boss, eventually buying the business with Alistair and two business partners. In 1997, Wendy and Alistair bought out their business partners, making Air-Rite Mechanical Services their family business.

Years after being shown the ropes by John, now Wendy is interested in showing the ropes to Roxi so she can eventually take the reins.

While Wendy says she fell into the industry by chance, Roxi believes that the RAC industry chose her.

Growing up with her parents owning and operating a refrigeration and air conditioning business it was inevitable that she would be working there herself one day, even if she was helping out from time to time while pursuing other career options.

When Roxi was 24, the receptionist working for the business had quit and there was no-one to replace her, so she took time off to help out once a week. It wasn't long before she started working the position as a full-time employee. She has now been working for the business for five years.

Not only is Roxi following in her mother's footsteps in the RAC office environment, she is also following them in education. She's also studying law at university, as well as mechanical engineering, so she can eventually take over the family business.

"When I began working at Air-Rite, mum suggested I study mechanical engineering to assist with my progression within the business, and hopefully it will allow me to hold the Unlimited Design Licence in the future when she wants to retire.

"My (mechanical engineering) degree will hopefully assist me in learning more about the project side of the business, as I want to be more involved with tendering on the mechanical packages for builders and running projects we have won. The law degree is to assist with the contracts aspect of the business."

While Wendy and Roxi have pursued their ambitions with the support of their family and employers that doesn't mean they've had it easy. The RAC industry's male-dominated nature has presented them with plenty of challenges to overcome.

"The hardest challenge I faced was when I first started working full-time at Air-Rite and I would go to the construction sites with the project manager to better understand their role. Very rarely would there be a female on sites," Roxi said.

"In the earlier stages of working in the industry, I would get harassed by other construction workers with inappropriate sexual comments and gestures, which made being on sites extremely uncomfortable...other times I found myself belittled over the phone by male builders when I would request information."

While Wendy also recalled challenges in being taken seriously by male counterparts, both of them emphasised that there has been improvement in the RAC industry on this front. Wendy has noticed improvement over her years of study and running the business, while Roxi has

noticed improvement through the creation and implementation of workplace laws to prevent the kind of harassment she endured.

Even though the RAC industry is male dominated, with their years of experience and the lessons learned along the way, Wendy and Roxi encourage any woman interested in a career in the RAC industry to go for it.

“There are some great individuals in our industry and I am lucky enough to have met numerous company owners, managers, consultants, suppliers and so on who have been respectful, courteous and sometimes helpful throughout my studying for my diploma. (RAC) is a great industry, just make sure that you are knowledgeable and gain experience on a practical level.” Wendy recommends while Roxi believes that women interested in a RAC career should reach for the stars.

“Don’t let anyone deter you from what you want to do and what you want achieve. Make sure you work hard and learn as much as you can so if anyone wants to doubt you, take the satisfaction in proving them wrong.”