

Minding the full house

To launch a new business you need passion, drive, and lots of self-belief. Minding My Own Business asks entrepreneurs what they did right and what they did wrong, so that others can learn from their lessons.

Lisa McFarlane runs a professional homesitting, pet-minding, and personal-organiser service for city and rural properties in the Canterbury area.

What did you do before this?
Lived in London for 4½ years doing investment-banking graduate recruitment for Credit Suisse & Goldman Sachs.

Why did you want to change?
London had lost its charm and I missed home — and especially working with animals. Also, I have always wanted to be in control of my own business, because I'm not the best person to be told what to do.

Where did the idea come from?
Having grown up on a farm, and adoring animals, I wanted to use my love for fluffy creatures with my recruitment experience, and this seemed the logical thing to do. As there was no service in existence in Christchurch, it seemed like the need for such an organisation was long overdue.

What made you think there was a market?
Talking to family friends made me realise that many people, especially farmers and small lifestyle-block owners, found it increasingly difficult to get away. Coupled with the growing incidence of robberies and property invasion, this all means people are reluctant to leave their homes unattended.

After three years organising homesits, it has also become clear how much the small things in life are appreciated — a freshly mown lawn, milk in the fridge, a happy walked dog, and a lasagne in the oven ready for the family's return. What could be nicer after a long journey?

What is the smartest thing you've done?
Deciding that if I were going to do it, I would do it properly — professionally or not at all. The sitters would be police-checked and reference-checked, and if I didn't have the right person then I would do it myself. It's so important for all parties to be happy, or how can one go on holiday and enjoy? The sitters are my



PHOTO: JOHN KIRK-ANDERSON

Homework: Lisa McFarlane with her own pet, Percy.

business, and without their constant loyalty and the respect they have for each individual home and animal, this just wouldn't work.

What is the dumbest thing you've done?

Set up a price structure based on what animal boarding establishments were charging, when in fact we were offering a completely different and much more comprehensive service. What is especially hard is having nothing much in the South Island to compare this with.

What has been the biggest challenge you've faced?

Not having someone else to share the load when the pressure comes on. Sometimes it's nice to be able to walk away and leave it with the boss to

deal with, but now — there have been sleepless nights.

What is the one piece of advice you wish somebody had given you?

Make sure you have the motivation inside you to do this. There are times initially when I thought I didn't have the guts and determination to run my own business, and receiving phone calls at all hours of the day and night can sometimes be frustrating. But at the end of the day, the positive feedback that my clients give me about the service makes it all worth while. It's what motivates me to keep going.

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