

THE POWER OF TWO

RHIAN DEUTROM

A COMMON warning shared among industry professionals is not to mix friendship and business.

But two Brisbane businesswomen have used their bond as a competitive advantage to drive their own ideas and success.

Blair Lifestyle Management's Adele Blair and wattsnext managing director Sue-Ellen Watts have known each other for six years.

Both were finalists in the 2011 Telstra Business Women's Awards, a journey which further cemented their friendship.

"We celebrate wins and losses together and if I have a concept to thrash out, she will be one of the people I ring for advice," Blair says.

Blair's lifestyle management company provides concierge services for individuals and businesses across Brisbane.

"Any task, errand or project that our clients don't have the resources or inclination to deal with themselves, we take care of," she says.

From organising a wedding cake to comparing the best car insurance policies, Blair says her team of five loves the challenge of unusual requests.

"We've had a request on a Thursday afternoon to deliver a bottle of champagne and flowers to a hotel on a remote island in Thailand for that Sunday.

"Another client fell in love with a jacket but couldn't find it so we located it and ordered it for her."

Delivering on tough orders still gives Blair a thrill, six years after launching her Newstead-based business.

"I love being a problem solver and I love that you can almost see the weight lift off a client's shoulders when we say, 'don't worry, we'll handle it,'" Blair says.

It was during a discussion between Blair and Watts that the pair decided to trial a corporate employee incentive package called The Staff Room. The unique rewards scheme allocates employees two concierge vouchers per month to use in their personal life.

According to Blair, the program provides businesses with an opportunity to motivate their staff and improve productivity.

"Instead of having a staff member on the internet for an hour searching for a plumber, employers could call their concierge service and have it done for them," she says.

Watts trialled the program in her human resources and performance specialist business wattsnext and reported an immediate success.

"If you want staff to help you achieve your business goals, you need to help them achieve their personal goals," Watts tells *QB Monthly*.

"The Staff Room makes my staff feel like VIPs and that's what they are to me.

"For me, it's about allowing my team to focus on delivering high quality work to our clients and not have to worry about the errands they have to run."

Despite those age-old warnings, blending business with friendship has strengthened the pair's professional bond over the years.

"Ever since we met we have always been 100 per cent supportive of each other's business ventures," Watts says.

"We send each other our goals at the beginning of the year because we're both committed to seeing the other achieve their dream."

For Blair, the feeling is mutual.

"We are both such strong ambassadors for each other's business."



SOUNDING BOARD: Adele Blair (left) and Sue-Ellen Watts are there to help each other. Picture: Jack Tran