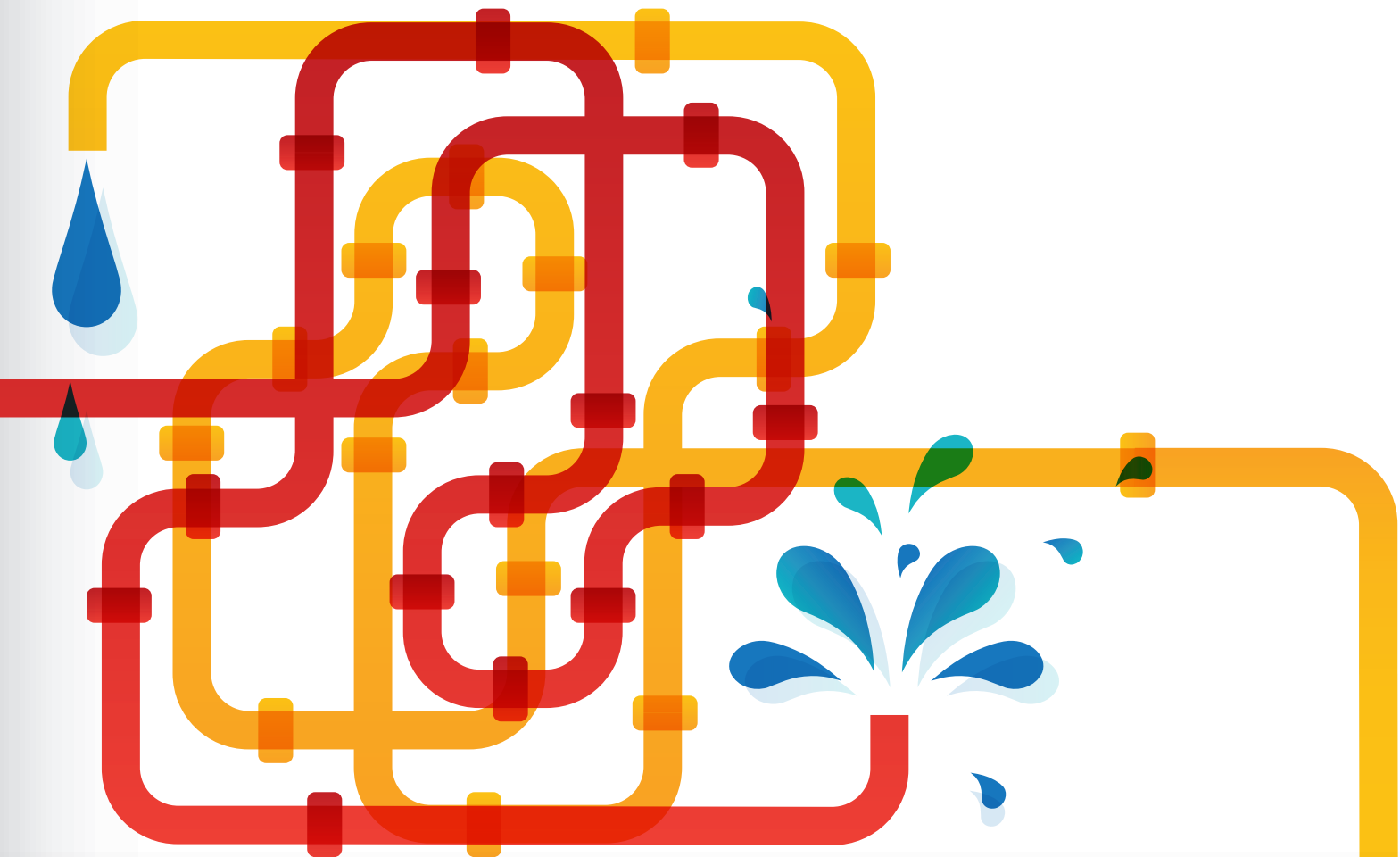


# PIPE PERFECTION PLUMBING: BUSTING THE 'BILLY BUMCRACK' STEREOTYPE

In this Q&A, owner and founder of Pipe Perfection Plumbing, Darren Clancy, explains how he is keeping his company ahead of the competition using his trained business acumen, a strong commitment to both customer service and staff training, and adopting technologies that most in his field aren't.



With over 20 years' experience, Clancy is a veteran of the plumbing industry and a member of the Master Plumbers Association NSW and the Strata Community of Australia. He founded Pipe Perfection Plumbing, which services the inner west and eastern suburbs of Sydney, in 2004 after he saw first-hand that the technical ability and professionalism of plumbers in the area was sub-standard.

Through Pipe Perfection Plumbing, Clancy is challenging long-held negative stereotypes about tradies – bumcracks, tardiness, lack of professionalism and the like – making him a force for good in his field. Read on as Clancy explains the business insights that have put him at the forefront of the plumbing game.

## Clancy is challenging long-held negative stereotypes about tradies – bumcracks, tardiness, lack of professionalism and the like.

### **My Business: What's the one thing you wish you'd known before you started in business?**

**Darren Clancy:** Thinking slowly and cautiously definitely has its merits, and it's important to an extent, but what I've come to realise is that acting quickly is even more valuable. If you don't act quickly – for example, if you leave something in the pipeline for too long – a competitor will act in your place.

Implementation is everything. There's no point having great ideas but not putting them into action or not seeing them through properly. You need to think carefully, but then act quickly.

### **MB: What are your most effective work habits?**

**DC:** The best work habit that I've picked up is freeing myself from distractions. I put this into practice after reading Dean



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*Clancy (front right) with his team and fleet.*

Jackson's *The 50-Minute Focus Finder*, in which Jackson explains how important it is to avoid getting distracted by emails, the internet, other people and, interestingly, your own thoughts.

To do this, you dedicate 50 minutes of one working day every month or two to writing down everything you'd like to achieve, both at work and in your personal life. By doing this, you actually promote clear and focussed thinking and are better able to prioritise your tasks. Then, once you're free from distractions, you sit down and work on your most important task or 'thought' from your list for 50 minutes. After this, have a 20-minute break and then move on to the next 'thought' for another 50 minutes. It's amazing what you can get done in 50 focussed minutes.

**MB: Who is the most important person to your business?**

**DC:** The most important person in my business is my wife, Laney, who is a driving force in Pipe Perfection Plumbing. She

supports me in everything I do, both at work and at home, and I'm quite sure that Pipe Perfection Plumbing would fall apart if it weren't for her management, organisational, computer and admin skills.

**MB: What's the biggest mistake you ever made in business? How did you fix it?**

**DC:** Allowing the business to grow too quickly when I hadn't yet learnt how to manage a team properly was the biggest mistake I've made so far. This ended up having a big effect on our bottom line.

We fixed this problem by downsizing, which allowed us to focus on the basics. It also gave us the opportunity to be deliberate in creating the culture and systems that we wanted for the business. Having less staff to manage gave me more time to be on the road, so I can see first-hand what my customers are experiencing and to ensure my plumbers are receiving constant training and refining of customer service and plumbing techniques.

If we were to expand our team again, we now have the foundations, standards and

systems in place to make it a successful business move.

**MB: How do you delight customers?**

**DC:** I delight customers, and encourage my staff to delight customers, by looking for both big and small ways to make interactions with customers happy interactions. Our aim is to make our customers' lives easier, so we try to be as helpful as we can possibly be on the phone, face-to-face, through social media or via emails.

For example, our email confirmations provide helpful hints on how customers can save money and free reports on how to find a good plumber. So, even if they don't choose us, they will hopefully be able to avoid enlisting the services of a shonky tradesman.

Most people expect 'Billy Bumcrack' to show up when they call a tradie; our plumbers challenge this stereotype by being punctual, polite and professional. We offer the best solutions first, not the easiest or the least time-consuming. All customers also receive a complimentary site inspection with maintenance recommendations that are specific to their house to extend the life of their plumbing.

Another thing that really sets us apart is the fact that we actually call every single customer after completing a job to say "thank you" and to get invaluable feedback.

**MB: Share your number one sales technique with us.**

**DC:** It all comes down to trust – if a customer trusts us, they'll do business with us. So, we tell customers to be confident in our expertise – we're the plumbers and the experts. We listen to what our customers have to say, ask questions and work out what's important to them. Then we work out the best solution and tell the customer what we need to do. That is what they expect of us, and we do it with confidence.



**MB: What is your favourite piece of business technology?**

**DC:** I'm addicted to cloud-based software, which I use for accounting purposes and job management. I love having all of the important business information at my fingertips, regardless of where I am. With cloud-based software, I don't need to rely on servers and additional admin staff to complete functions when important details are stored securely in the cloud and our plumbers can access customer records and documentation from anywhere.

**MB: Please share with us your best tip for managing people?**

**DC:** One of my favourite sayings is, "What's inspected, gets respected". In other words, it's not enough to have a great initiative, prepare a plan and then roll it out to your staff. You have to introduce things slowly, and it can get quite repetitive. I'll mention things in one-on-ones, send text reminders, chat about it over the phone and give feedback on staff members' integration of the new initiative. I do training sessions on it, over and over again until it's like second nature to them. Because, when people know they're being watched, they'll keep doing what they're supposed to be

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doing. The second you stop monitoring them, they stop!

**MB: What's more important in business: passion or preparation?**


**DC:** Both are equally important. However, all the passion and all the preparation in the world don't mean a thing unless you're able to put your initiatives into action. Acting quickly and getting initiatives rolling is what makes you successful as a business owner.

**MB: How do you relax?**

**DC:** After just 15 minutes of boxing, my mind goes completely blank and I'm able to achieve an incredible level of power that enables me to burn energy. I sometimes box

before a meeting with my staff, or first thing in the morning so I arrive energised and really pumped for the day.

**MB: How do you foster and express creativity?**

**DC:** I'm constantly on the lookout for new ways to surprise and delight our customers so that they remember us and want to do repeat business with us. In order to surprise them, we have to be creative. We look at what other plumbers are doing and try to do what they're not doing, which varies from caring about their needs and communicating clearly and meaningfully with them, to using unexpected channels like Pinterest to educate them and brand ourselves in a unique way. 

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