

Mick and Amanda To Play

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WOMAN	Welcome to the National Careers Institute podcast. In this series, we'll hear from some former VET graduates and learn about the pathway they took to get the careers they wanted. Vocational Education and Training is a great way to start, change or boost your career, and there's no time like the present to explore your options. Visit yourcareer.gov.au to find out how to take the next step in your career. And now here's your host, Australia's National Careers Ambassador, Scott Cam.
SCOTT	Thanks for joining us, and on behalf of the National Careers Institute, welcome to our podcast series. If you haven't heard our chats with some of our other VET graduates, make sure you have a listen. Our guests today are Mick and Amanda Astill from Kingaroy in Queensland who run the family-owned Astill's Electrical Services, named the Medium Employer of the Year in the 2019 Australian Training Awards and a member of the Australian VET alumni. Welcome, Mick and Amanda. That's impressive. Medium Employer of the Year in 2019. Fantastic. How are you guys?
AMANDA	Yeah, we're pretty good. Happy to be here.
MICK	Good, thanks, Scotty. Thanks for having us.
SCOTT	How is Kingaroy right now? What's the weather doing?
MICK	Cold. Blowing and cold.
AMANDA	Yeah.
MICK	It is sunny, though, so it's a good thing. We spent the weekend at the dam. It was nice.
SCOTT	Fantastic. Now, from little things, big things grow, eh? You started very small in your family office and now you've got 20 staff. That's fantastic. Tell us... Tell us about that journey.
MICK	So, 2009, we started the business from our shed at home just after we got married. It was... We got... From Wondai. Did... Ran for about three months before we had the need to put on our first apprentice and then stayed in Wondai for about two years and then moved the business into Kingaroy because we needed bigger premises.
SCOTT	Fantastic.
MICK	Then, yeah, it just rolled on from that. And now, 2020, I think we've got 32 staff, 32 team members, yep.
SCOTT	32 team... I love small-business stories like that. It's just, like, a mum and dad starting a business and then all of a sudden you're employing 32 people. How important is hiring apprentices to you guys?
AMANDA	Well, for us, it's just...it's massive. It's one of the big ways we've grown our business. So, we're in a regional location and it's really nice that we can offer something for our local school leavers...
SCOTT	Yeah.
AMANDA	..where they can stay in the town, stay with their family and still advance their careers. It's really... It's a good thing.
SCOTT	I mean, as we know, you guys started as an apprentice or started from scratch and it's so important to give that back to another young person who's exactly like you were 20 years ago or however long that may be. And I hear... Because I had quite a few apprentices in my business as well, and I had a young bloke that stayed with me for 12 years. And I know that your very first employee who started his apprenticeship with you was... He was with you for just under 10 years, is that right?
MICK	Yep. So, Nate, he finished... He was my first apprentice, three months into having the business. He came on board, lasted until October last year. So we got just short of 10 years. Still, you know, Nate, we still see Nate in town. Still there... He's working with another apprentice of ours who went and started his business as well, so, yeah.
SCOTT	Yeah. That's fantastic. So you're witnessing these young people who you've trained from scratch and they're now starting their own businesses and they're like family to you, aren't they?

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MICK	Yeah, so the opportunity you get as a tradesman, as an apprentice, to go through and start your own business just like we did 11 years ago now. We've got four of our apprentices who have gone to start their own business over the last couple of years, so, yeah.
SCOTT	That's... Yeah, it's fantastic, isn't it? You're listening to the National Careers Institute podcast. Our guests today are Mick and Amanda Astill from Astill's Electrical Services, the 2019 Medium Employer of the Year. Now, Mick and Amanda, what was it... What did it mean for you guys winning that Medium Employer of the Year award at the Australian Training Awards? Like, what did that mean to you guys, your business, your families? You know, how did that make you feel?
AMANDA	Well, firstly for us, it was kind of... It felt like a bit of a win for the little guys because coming from a regional location, a small town, everybody knew about it. It was really nice to kind of say, look, we can start our own business up and we can be up there with bigger businesses with lots more employees and expertise, and we can, you know, put our hand up and say, "Hey, we really value our employees and we're going to put up some really good training systems to make sure that we can keep upskilling our staff," which was really nice to be recognised for that.
SCOTT	Yeah, and it'd mean a lot to your 32 team members as well, you guys winning that business. That makes them feel proud because they've been a part of that, that win for them as well. So, must have been terrific for morale.
AMANDA	Absolutely. I mean, we wouldn't have been there without them. So we've got some absolutely amazing team members who are like family. We've known them for a long time and they're just so loyal, they care so much about the business and it's just...it's just really... It's really nice to have that team atmosphere.
SCOTT	And you mentioned ongoing training. It's really important to keep up with the times and continue training like doing other VET courses that you can do along the way and getting your people to do other courses to upskill them as well. You think that's important?
MICK	Oh, definitely, definitely. So, times are changing all the time with solar, with air conditioning. You know, solar's really only just booming in Australia.
SCOTT	Yeah.
MICK	And we need to keep up with it. We need to keep up with all those kind of industries, so... And also your team, they want to...they want to grow, they want to be the best they can be. So, not just important for us, but important for them, important for our customers as well, because they want the best product they can and they want somebody who knows what they're talking about.
SCOTT	Exactly. Exactly. So there's going to be young people listening to this that are deciding what they want to do in their lives. It's tough sometimes when you leave school and you're not sure what to do. What would you say? What's a bit of advice you could give them if they're listening right now about getting into the industry? Here's the big words of wisdom from you, Mick...or Amanda, please.
MICK	No, from... Yeah. So, it's a conversation I have with our first-year apprentices the first time as soon as they start. You're going into an industry where no matter what you do, just...you get through your apprenticeship and after that, if you want to do something different or you want to go overseas, it's something that you've always got to fall back on. That's probably the most important thing, I find. You can... No matter what, trades are always going to be needed. So you've got that security for life. And that's what I tell my team, my tradesmen, my apprentices.
SCOTT	That's fantastic. Now, Amanda, we know that you're the brains behind the operation, so...
AMANDA	(LAUGHS)
SCOTT	..what advice would you give those young people that are coming through and thinking of doing that?
AMANDA	I think from what we're seeing, I think people just need to be encouraged to get out there and have a go. Put your hand up on your school holidays, do some work experience and find out what you're interested in. I really like to see when people have actually got some skills just from

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	working around the yard with Dad or, you know, they can use hand tools. It's really... Those type of skills are going to be useful in so many different jobs, so it doesn't hurt to get out there and give something a go in your spare time and employers will really look on you favourably if you do that.
SCOTT	Yeah. Look, it's so fantastic, your success story. I do love a husband-and-wife small business because that's what my wife and I did. We worked in our business together doing exactly what you guys are doing and we had apprentices as well. And your story is just a huge success in Kingaroy in Queensland. It's so great to talk to you, Mick and Amanda, and thanks so much for your time today. And if you're interested in finding out how Vocational Education and Training can help you get the career you want, visit the National Careers Institute website at yourcareer.gov.au . Hey, Mick and Amanda, thanks so much for your time. Good luck with the future. I'm sure you're going to have a hundred employees in the next couple of years - you'll be huge.
AMANDA	(LAUGHS) Thank you, mate.
MICK	Thanks, buddy.
SCOTT	Hey, good on you. See you, guys.
AMANDA	See you later.
MICK	Thanks, mate. See ya.
SCOTT	I'm Scott Cam. Thanks for listening.
WOMAN	Thanks for listening to the National Careers Institute podcast. To explore how to start, change or boost your career, visit the National Careers Institute website at yourcareer.gov.au to view the online resources to help you make informed decisions about learning, training and work pathways.