



Nicola O'Neill

Harvest Resources Ltd.

GOING FOR GROWTH PROFILE

NAME:

Nicola O'Neill

BUSINESS

Harvest Resources Ltd.

POSITION

Managing Director

WHAT WE DO

People Development Specialists

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Nicola O'Neill had never planned on owning her own company and became an entrepreneur unexpectedly in 2006. Over 20 years ago her career in Training and Education began in retail. She worked her way up to the appointment of Group Training Officer for the Roches Stores chain throughout Ireland. During this time Nicola channelled her passion for education into her own personal development and continued her studies to achieve a Masters in Education. Twelve years ago, she then moved into consultancy when she became part of the Harvest Resources team.

Within months an opportunity arose when Harvest Resources was re-structured, Nicola became the Manager of the Client Project Team. She gained experience in all aspects of designing, delivering and evaluating high impact organisational development solutions, including leadership development, change management, client relationship management and performance management initiatives, to name but a few. In 2005, as part of the Harvest succession programme it was planned that the Founder and Managing Director of Harvest Resources, Pearse Walsh, would retire and Nicola was selected to replace him. The plans were accelerated however, when Pearse died quite suddenly and Nicola found herself and her business partner Frank Rock embarking on a Management buyout (MBO) in 2006, leading to her unexpected path into entrepreneurship.

As a result, she became Managing Director and principle of Harvest Resources with an urgent need to develop a strategy to overcome the sudden loss of a key player in the business and to hold onto the existing loyal client base. *"As MD, you are in control; every decision you make impacts on the business. I was thrown into the deep end and had no previous client development or sales experience or indeed had no experience of running a business. Managing ownership has definitely been the biggest learning experience for me. Luckily, I had a great team working with me. We gave ourselves one year to turn the business around; we had to really use the skills of strategy development, team development and leadership that we normally guided our clients through."*

During her first year as Managing Director, Nicola and her team developed and implemented an aggressive business plan. *"We re-energised our strategy with a strong emphasis on continuing the values that Pearse had instilled, of "One Team" with a Vision of "Being the Partner of Preference in our areas of expertise. We developed a two year plan that included the development of a new client relationship management engine, a graduate programme, new client solution offers, a partnership with the Irish Institute of Training and Development (IITD) by sponsoring the National Training Awards and stronger emphasis on developing in-house thought leaders."*

Nicola and the Harvest team also launched *"The Pearse Walsh Award for Innovation in the Transfer of Learning"* in honour of the company's founder presented at the yearly *National Training Awards*. Now in its sixth year, with a prestigious list of winners that includes *Learning Zone*, a collaboration between Bank of Ireland and Accenture; Ernst & Young, Ulster Bank, Topaz, Irish Distillers, Pernod Ricard and the Musgrave Group.

In 2007 Nicola and her team set up the Harvest Training Academy offering open and accredited programmes in a variety of disciplines to a variety of employed people. This offer has now extended to the jobseeker population. Despite the recession, Harvest Resources continues to work with many corporate and multi-national firms and is working increasingly with the SME sector. Nicola is passionate about leading the Harvest Resources team to deliver quality, creative and impactful solutions to the company's client partners. A participant in the fourth cycle of Going for Growth, Nicola is clear about its value: *"Going for Growth allowed me to take some time out from the day to day running of the business in order to focus on strategy. It gave me a thinking space and an opportunity to connect with like-minded people. It provided an opportunity to be continuously supported, challenged and inspired"*. Nicola found the National Forum to have been particularly beneficial, describing it as *"informative, challenging, thought-provoking and fun."*

Despite growing organically year on year, Nicola and her team are now even more ambitious and are implementing a three year growth strategy to include the development of an online learning offer. *"We want Harvest Resources to really bring our values alive; to be a compelling to do business with; to be a compelling place to work; and to be a compelling place to invest in"*.



Investing in your future

