

SUSIE AFSUN

FOUNDING DIRECTOR - STOCKTON GRANGE REAL ESTATE

THERE'S A NEW POWER COUPLE IN TOWN: IN THE HARD-FOUGHT BATTLE OF SYDNEY'S WESTERN SUBURBS PROPERTY MARKET, SUSIE AFSUN AND HER HUSBAND AARON HAVE TAKEN OVER A ONCE-FAILING MOUNT DRUITT REAL ESTATE OFFICE AND TURNED IT AROUND TO NOW EMPLOY ALMOST THIRTY STAFF.



Not new to business, Stockton Grange co-founder and licensee, Susie Afsun, along with Aaron, has launched a new real estate brand that's all about being first class, and offering a transparency and truthfulness that until now have perhaps been missing in real estate.

Both born in Bangladesh, they are also busy raising a family of three young children. Balancing work and family is a priority that Susie is very aware of, and she always strives to prioritise her children's activities over work.

Both Susie and Aaron realised early in their careers they would struggle working for someone else. Putting profits ahead of people wasn't the way they were brought up, and they both always felt restricted by the corporate culture.

**"FIRST CLASS SERVICE,
FIRST CLASS RESULTS."**

"I grew up in Bangladesh in a fairly comfortable environment. My father owned farmland, which had been in the family for decades, and would rent the land to farmers and he also received a small portion of the profits. So I understood finances from an early age. I also learnt from my father the value of keeping debts under control.

Stockton Grange

“In fact his philosophy was to always pay off your debts. He used to say, ‘never borrow money, you never want people knocking at your door’, said Aaron.

Susie added, “We enjoy working for ourselves, as opposed to being employed. We have a closer relationship with our clients, and we’re both very much driven to help them succeed. We have more latitude in how we can achieve that.”

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When asked to expand on the topic of leadership Susie says “Leading isn’t just about telling people what to do: you have to show them. You have to pull them into your vision and you have to believe in them.”

She adds, “Leadership is about constantly listening, observing and assessing. And reminding yourself to compliment staff and show you care about their well-being and development too.”

How does this working couple maintain the balance of work and family demands? “Our culture is very family-oriented, and I’m constantly mindful to not miss those one-off moments when my children are

blooming: developing their own personalities and important milestones and experiences.”

Susie intends to take the re-branded business even further than the combined current listings of almost twelve hundred properties under management, with a strong residential property sales team being developed as well.

She relishes bringing to the equation her wealth of knowledge and experience of over fourteen years in the banking industry, where she was known for her skills in people management, customer service and lending.

Susie’s incredible work ethic and positive attitude is what sets her aside from others. Her hard-working approach ensures her clients have a greater chance of achieving a first class result compared to other agencies.

“Whatever the client needs, we will get it done,” she asserts.

A dedicated and focused individual, Susie takes enormous pride in her work and providing first-class service to the clients and agents. “It’s the one thing we can do to set us apart for our competitors, and that builds referrals and then the word-of-mouth snowballs.”

Susie says she wants her team to thrive on challenge. With a dedicated property management department servicing residential and commercial, she knows that the company represents the interests of property owners throughout the Mt Druitt area including surrounding western suburbs and beyond.

The previous incarnation was established in 2000, so it was firmly established as an innovative market leader. Now as Stockton Grange it’s soon to be acknowledged as a premier real estate agency across residential sales, property management and marketing.



Susie says, “At Stockton Grange, we genuinely believe we can do good things for people and have an ongoing positive impact. Just making transactions has never appealed to us. We would rather make lifelong relationships.”

With a pledge to be innovative, accountable, trustworthy, professional, efficient, and always operate with ethical principles, Stockton Grange aims to live by its guaranteed promise of trust and integrity.

“We understand that first and foremost people want to maximise the overall financial return on their property. Your property represents a significant financial asset and your main objective is to realise the best financial returns on that asset.

“We pride ourselves on acting as though we are the owners for every property we manage. So if something new or unforeseen happens we always keep you fully informed,” said Susie.

“To help clients achieve the best outcomes we use the most advanced technology and systems available for collecting rent, ensuring timely payments, arranging repairs and maintenance and the day to day management of all properties.

“This frees up our Property Management team to concentrate on communicating with the client and keeping them personally informed and updated on all matters.”

“At Stockton Grange we inform you of the real situation and the most likely maximum sale price you can expect.

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We don’t – and won’t – promise an unrealistic sale price just to gain your business,” said Susie.

“All our executives are skilled sales negotiators who will work for your best outcome – they are motivated by your needs rather than their own financial requirements or targets.

She adds: “Clients respect our team for their high ethics and honesty. We have a record of selling ninety-five percent of our clients’ homes within our quoted price range.

“We sell the positives of the property, not the price, and we will never mislead vendors on expectations because we always present our honest opinion,” said Susie.

“Compare this with unrealistic price estimates, where a seller’s home remains ‘in’ the market for far too long. Consequently loss of buyer interest results in increasing pressure from the agent to ‘reduce the price’ below your expectations in order to find a buyer.

“Our approach comes as a result of our team being remunerated with a salary and a commission structure so they’re judged on their abilities, and are paid accordingly, unlike many sales agents who are incentivised on pure commission to simply sell houses ‘at any cost’ or they don’t get paid.

“In summary, our team is committed to deliver maximum value to their clients and achieve the best possible price for them, all done in a friendly, honest and refreshing manner,” says Susie.

Among the team are some very well-connected local agents, with as much as forty years’ experience, so the team has a great network, as well as a clear understanding of anything that might need to be done in order to add value to a property and help to maximise the sale price to potential buyers.

Susie continues: “That local knowledge means we’ve learnt exactly what buyers really value and what they don’t, so we won’t recommend vendors spend money on things that won’t add value to their home.

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“To achieve the best outcome, we tailor buyer inspections to your individual situation, and we use a broad range of market intelligence tools and indicators. Most commonly, introducing qualified buyers sourced from our large database consisting of seventeen years’ worth of buyer enquiry.

“Stockton Grange takes a true team approach, and all our sales executives work in unison, rather than as a single commission-driven individual who will often only act for their own self-interest rather than the client’s. By pooling their wealth of local knowledge and contacts we ensure to market all properties for the best price possible.”

ADVICE

Susie recommends people selling their homes spend some time thinking about what the buyer wants to see, which means in many cases de-cluttering and investing in some property styling.

“A small investment can completely change the look and feel of a property, including the externals and garden, where the potential buyers’ first impressions are often formed,” she said.

“It’s the biggest asset with the biggest potential so people have to trust the help the agent is offering. We want them to become great advocates of our business.”

On a macro business level, Susie believes that trust is at the top of the list of essential ingredients for anyone

in a competitive role where there are perceptions of capability and value involved.

“Developing trust means taking time to sit down and getting to know the client in-depth and perhaps over the long term too. What drives them, what are they wanting from the sale, and what will they be doing post-sale? These are all important questions that we like to know upfront,” says Susie.

Susie also learns a lot from her husband Aaron, who acts as a mentor, and helped purchase the previous entity. Turning it around between them has been a team effort, and they are creating a new brand in the West, with “first-class” as its motto.

“We live by that,” says Susie, “We are here to make a difference to the lives of our clients and to do that we have to be willing to be that difference.”

When you ask Susie for her advice on starting a business there would be no prizes for guessing the top two things on her list: belief and passion.

“Being passionate about what you’re doing is the most important thing, and having a strong belief in what you’re doing goes hand in hand with that. You can’t be passionate if you don’t believe in what you’re doing, and why would you believe in something you’re not passionate about?

“If your motivation is to just make money, then you run the risk of bending your morals, and that’s dangerous; it can lead to the collapse of your business.

“Then when you’ve given that a tick, you need to have some financial literacy. If you don’t understand the finances of your business it becomes very difficult to set a strategy in place to take you to the next level.

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“Don’t be afraid to seek advice, but remember, it is just advice. Most of those giving the advice don’t share your passion or belief for what you’re doing.

“Most financial planners and accountants are employees and have never owned their own business, so they know little about running a business. Listen to their advice, but you still have to make the decision.

“One other area I believe is important is your interaction with other people - in particular those you’re working with. It was a lesson I learned very early in my career, and those lessons have been invaluable as our business has grown.

“If you don’t have the ability to lead, rather than manage people, it becomes very difficult to not only grow your business, but even to maintain it.

“There is no such thing as a one-woman show, or a one-woman brand.”

GIVING BACK

Mentoring is one activity Susie relishes, and she has helped many staff over the years.

She mentors her employees with their financial goals and even personal grooming as she sees giving a level of guidance as part of her community leadership role.

It’s within their community that Susie and her team do most of their volunteer work. “Being involved in your

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community is vital for any business, but particularly a business like ours.

“But if I did that just for business reasons, the community would see right through it, so you have to be genuine.

“We have so many different communities in our area, it’s part-and-parcel of having a richly diverse ethnic population, so I actively involve myself wherever I can. Each group has its own festivals and I make sure my business and I personally have a profile at all of them.

“And given the large migrant base in this area, you generally find yourself supporting their broader communities, the countries from which they have come. Through the United Nations Refugees Agency in many cases we’re helping family and friends of those here in Australia.

“We’re also a big contributors to our own country, Bangladesh. There’s a lot poverty in that country, and we still have many family members living there, and it’s a privilege to be able to help them.”



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