

# Run with the Bull

Barry Bull does things his way, motivating businesses and recruiting celebrities as he goes, writes **Phil Brown**

interview 

WITH PHIL BROWN

People have trouble saying no to Brisbane businessman Barry Bull. The late John Denver wanted to but couldn't. Sir Cliff Richard said no but later changed his mind, and a string of other celebrities has fallen for the Bull persuasiveness.

Armed with his business mantra, "No is negotiable", Barry, 63, turned his Toombul Music store into 'celebrity central' and a mecca for music-lovers.

"Sir Cliff Richard has been to Toombul Music five times," boasts Barry, who now counts the pop legend as a pal. "Every time he comes to Australia, the only public appearance he does is at Toombul."

Having handed over his 25-year-old business to his children (Justin, 36, Gavin, 34, and Anissa, 29), the award-winning businessman, known to many as 'The Music Man', is concentrating on a new career as a motivational speaker and author whose 'Bullisms' shed light on how to succeed in an increasingly competitive world.

His books *A Little Bull Goes a Long Way* and *My Little Book of Bull* (wordplay concerning his surname abounds) have sold well, and he has a new one - *The Bullseye Principle*, a practical guide to succeeding in business and life - smattered with anecdotes from Bull's past.

A boy from Indooroopilly had a humble start in the business, working at Kings music store in Queen Street where Barry Gibb and his brothers, later The Bee Gees, were regular clients. Eventually, he went south where

he worked his way up in the record business, becoming national marketing chief for CBS Records (now Sony BMG Entertainment) in the 1970s and rubbing shoulders with the likes of Billy Joel, Men at Work and Meatloaf.

Then Barry and wife Kayleen opted to move back to Brisbie. He bought a business at Westfield Shoppingtown Toombul (now Centro Toombul) in 1981, but wanted to continue hobnobbing with the stars. So how do you do that when you run a shop in a suburban Brisbane shopping centre? By utilising the "No is negotiable" principle.

He started by convincing singer Johnny Mathis to come to Toombul in 1981. Then George Benson lobbed in, wowing shoppers. A parade of other stars has dutifully trooped through the place since, helping promote their music and Barry's shop, and meeting and greeting the assembled hordes.

But Sir Cliff Richard had always said no until Barry developed a strategy to change his mind. Lord Mayor Sallyanne Atkinson was campaigning in 1988 when Barry suggested that it wouldn't do her electioneering any harm if she were to present Cliff Richard with a citizenship scroll in front of thousands of screaming fans at Toombul. She agreed.

"I thought to myself 'Wow, unbelievable' ... I just have one problem - I don't have Cliff Richard," recalls Barry in his new book. "The



In June ... Barry Bull has turned his love of music into an award-winning business attracting top-selling bands like The Corrs

Main photograph // Richard Waugh

next day I phoned Cliff's manager." With the Lord Mayor lined up, Sir Cliff finally agreed and Barry says convincing him was a seminal moment in his business career.

"I thought, 'Was that all it took?' Over the years he knew who I was and what I wanted. I was always 90 per cent of the way ... the word stopping me from achieving my goal had been 'no'. Not taking 'no' for an answer was the birth of my biggest business hit. 'No is negotiable'."

By attracting celebrities to his store, business boomed and Barry has won more than 30 Westfield retail awards and a Commonwealth Centenary Medal for distinguished achievement in business. He could have expanded based on that success but decided to focus on running one business well.

"Everybody thinks big is best, but one of my messages to other business people is that you don't have to be the biggest to be the best," explains the diminutive businessman.

Barry was asked to give some motivational talks and is now in demand on the speaking circuit. "I'm not just talking about something from a theoretical point of view," he explains. "I have done it and a lot of clients want to hear from someone who has practical experience."

*The Bullseye Principle* // Barry Bull (Macmillan, \$32.95)

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