

THE SWITCH

From scientist to career coach

Particle accelerators and experimental physics were what drove Kevin Orrman-Rossiter to leave Australia for the Britain. Completing his PhD at Salford University in Manchester, he stayed there for nearly a decade before returning home as a researcher.

He was awarded the prestigious QEII Fellowship (see cover story on how fellowships can advance your career, page 5) for the next three years. "I was interested in trying to understand the surface structures of electronic materials as well as growing new super-strength materials like diamonds in thin layers for industrial uses," he says.

At the end of the fellowship, Orrman-Rossiter found himself thinking: "What next?"

His options were to stay in Australian academia, head overseas again for new research opportunities or do something completely different.

"I decided that I needed to get out of academic science and apply those skills to the real world," he says.

He saw an opportunity to work in Amcor's research and technology laboratories and relished the challenge of persuading management that he could move from academia to industry.

"I really enjoyed it," he says. "As well as doing the research, I was their 'pet scientist' who could talk to the guys on the shop floor about products they were using and didn't mind getting covered in pulp or glue."

After nearly seven years, he became more interested in the business side. "Some of my colleagues weren't convinced that I could make such a shift, so I completed studies at Melbourne

Business School part-time to convince them that I was just as business-savvy as they were."

He found a marketing and strategy role at NAB and noticed that his physics background complemented his business skills. "The IT guys thought I was worth talking to because I wasn't just a dumb marketer and the business people respected my experience at Amcor," he says.

As he continued his work in insurance and financial services, Orrman-Rossiter was becoming increasingly sought by students, researchers and academics for advice on how they could also change careers.

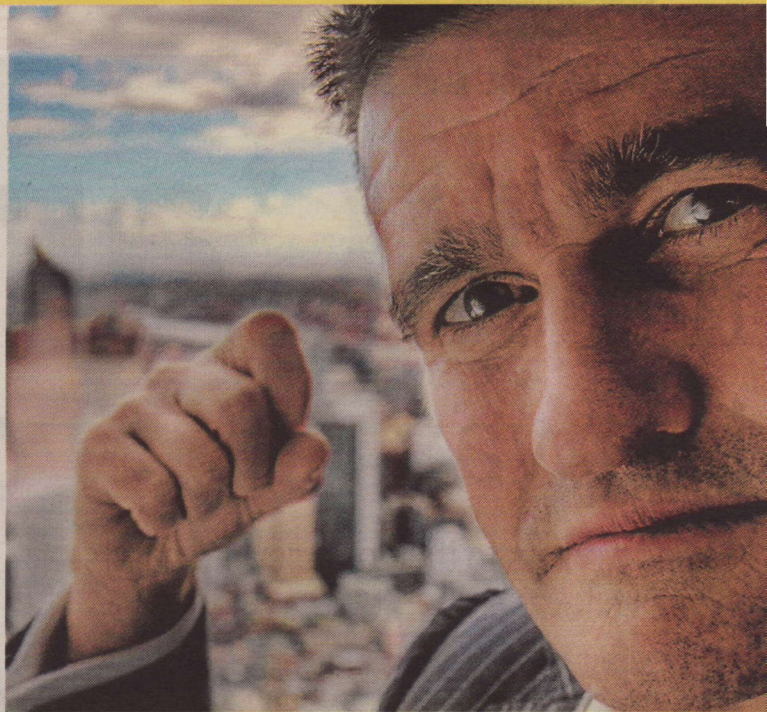
"It first started at university with offers of bottles of wine as we helped them get their CVs together, prepare for interviews and show how their skills and qualifications could be transferred to new sectors, but they'd then tell their friends and, eventually, we could see that there was a need that could be filled.

"My wife – a scientist from the field of medical research – started Clarity Now in 1998, focusing on career coaching and individual goal setting. Tailored programs are designed to help clients use their strengths to move further in careers.

"I've been coaching for six years full-time and have learned that lots of people underestimate the time it takes to understand business and be useful. It takes effort and it is important to gain experience and be able to cope with an environment that can change very rapidly."

KATH LOCKETT

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THEN

NOW

SALARY Equivalent to a lecturer/research fellow. "In the early 1990s, it was about \$45,000."

WORK-LIFE BALANCE "Pretty good. I used to go cycling and surfing on the weekends."

HOURS "Very varied. Some experiments required me to be there all night but it was reasonable in that I could virtually be my own boss."



Experimental ... Kevin Orrman-Rossiter (second left, above) in 1988 at the Salford University UHV ion-scattering lab; and (top) as a career coach for Clarity Now, which he co-founded and runs with his wife. Photo: Craig Sillitoe

SALARY "I'm comfortable but when it's your own business, you are always aware that everything is reliant on your health and availability. You can't have bad days and still earn an income."

HOURS "Pretty reasonable, 40-hour weeks."

WORK-LIFE BALANCE "I work with my wife, which some people might find a challenge but we structure things so it suits our lives and our skills complement each other. We know that we have to save money before we take a holiday and plan our commitments around that."

MISS "The excitement of doing experiments and getting results that no one has seen before, which is academia at its best. Colleagues who were intelligent, challenging and provided lots of intellectual inspiration."

CHALLENGES "You have to be at your best for every client. Everyone is an individual with their own career needs and my advice needs to be fresh and relevant."

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