

■ Around five years ago, Tony Gattari was the toast of the retailing world, 'a fast-talking sales hurricane' whose business acumen saw mega-store Harvey Norman's computer sales soar from \$12 million to \$565 million in nine years.

Heady stuff for the self-confessed 'wog from the western suburbs of Sydney' who rose to become general manager of Harvey Norman. At the height of his success, however, and with the retail world at his feet, Tony made a sea change.

'Although my career was extremely successful, at 35 my family life was in a mess because I had neglected the people I truly loved—my wife and two little girls—as I got caught up in this "my work is my god" scenario,' he says.

In order to spend more time with his family, Tony started an online retailing company. Caught up in the boom and bust of the dotcom era, it didn't work out, he says, and he sold the business in a merger deal, eventually becoming CEO of technology company Uniqueworld before stepping down in March 2002 to form his current company Achievers Group Pty Ltd.

Moving into business consultancy, coaching, motivating, workshops and company retreats, he became an adviser to some of Australia's Top 100 companies. As well as executive coaching and sales training, Achievers Group diversified into financial planning, life performance coaching and physical training.

In the meantime, Tony was brought up short by a blood disease that affected his liver. 'I was coughing up blood and it was very debilitating, affecting my work life, my social life and my family life. I was at my wits' end,' he says, 'and I didn't know what to do.'



Business class

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Corporate guru Tony Gattari's faith in God changed his perspective, says Dawn Volz.

'Then my wife said to me, "Have you tried God?" I had never gone to Sunday school and really didn't have a very positive view of Christians, but I went to church and something struck me about the teaching. I could see that Christianity had a component that no other religion had—the principle of grace. That was profound.'

'So I made a decision to become a Christian, and it was a struggle. It didn't happen overnight, but through the prayers of my wife I've experienced the transformation it's had in my life, in my relationship with her, my kids and in my work.'

Though his health at this stage was still less than perfect, Tony became involved in Teen Challenge, a Christian organisation giving young men who struggle with substance abuse a second chance at life.

'I saw that in many ways you find God in unexpected places,' he says. 'I didn't necessarily see God at church, but I saw him at Teen Challenge when a heroin addict gave his testimony of how his life had been transformed by the power of Christ.'

Now Tony's life is God-based, he's learned to prioritise—God first, family second and work third, even though in the last six months his working life has been ratcheted up a notch or two.

The day after giving a motivational workshop for the executive team and staff of Gowings—a NSW-based, publicly listed men's department store chain languishing in the retail doldrums—he was asked to become their managing director.

'I'm enjoying it immensely,' he says, 'and I'm still running the Achievers Group

[in addition to giving coaching workshops for church-going small business owners], but I fundamentally believe my role is to become dispensable.

'Gerry Harvey [founder of Harvey Norman], who was a great mentor, was very hands-off and that's the sort of model I try to work on.'

Whatever happens in the future, Tony says, his priorities remain rock solid.

'Becoming a Christian has given me a "why". I'm now convinced that my purpose is to serve other people, to encourage and uplift them, and if I can do that and leave a legacy not only for my children but for other people, then I know that's what God wants me to do.'