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LA TROBE FINANCIAL'S
HEAD OF MARKETING,
CATERINA NESCI, ON
THE VALUES THAT
HAVE GUIDED THE
COMPANY'S SUCCESS
FOR NEARLY 70 YEARS.

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IMAGES LA TROBE FINANCIAL

A large, professional portrait of Caterina Nesci, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a black blazer over a white blouse with a large, elegant white bow at the neck. Her arms are crossed, and she is wearing a watch on her left wrist. The background is a blurred office setting with blue and white tones.

QUIET ACHIEVER

At the heart of non-bank wealth management company La Trobe Financial is its mission to make a difference to people's lives. "We believe that we are truly assisting in creating direct and indirect employment, adding to the wealth creation of our people, and assisting newly arrived migrants and many other under-served clients obtain access to financial independence," says La Trobe Financial's Head of Marketing, Caterina Nesci.

"I've always liked the idea that we are also in the business of making people's dreams come true. When a client cannot obtain a home loan from the bank, La Trobe Financial will find ways – where possible – to help them."

La Trobe Financial provides wealth management solutions for customers including loans, and insurance and investment products. Caterina describes the company as a quiet achiever. In 1952, it began with only eight staff and A\$12 million in assets under management (AUM) and, today, it has more than 380 staff and A\$8.5 billion in AUM.

Further, over the past five years, the company has delivered A\$314.1 million in interest income to mum and dad investors. "La Trobe Financial is a true success story, having managed over A\$17 billion without loss to any institutional investors since 1952," Caterina notes. "It has used good business sense to thrive where many global giants have fallen, proving that being solid is far more important than being big."

To uphold its broader mission, La Trobe Financial adheres to the four principles of trust, exceptional service, accountability and making a difference. In other words: TEAM. "We do this to ensure that each of our staff understands our core purpose and our values," Caterina explains. "To work at La Trobe Financial alongside such great people who are committed to this cause is a real honour. Their passion and endless pursuit to improve the financial standing of our clients is our greatest asset – it's in our DNA."

Caterina explains that from the very first job interview, each worker is reminded: "If you place the customer first, then you can never go wrong." This is especially important when responding to market, regulatory and economic challenges. "Focusing on what we do best reminds us that

it is far more important to be 'true to label'. Leading an organisation with a purpose and core values is imperative."

Continuing with its aim of encouraging positive change in the lives of others, the company established the La Trobe Financial Foundation in 1978, which provides aid to various healthcare, education, cultural and sporting initiatives. To date, it has donated more than A\$8 million. In addition, the company holds a 'La Trobe lend a hand day', where staff are encouraged to volunteer with community organisations of their choice for one day a year. And their time is fully paid for by the company.

"The benefits of this program go beyond the dollar spend to nurture a spirit of community and contribution," Caterina says. "We are very proud of the fact that the Foundation has always had an unwavering commitment to really making a difference in the lives of others."

La Trobe Financial is headquartered in Melbourne and has offices in Sydney, Shanghai and Hong Kong. To effectively do business with Asia, Caterina believes in developing long-term relationships and engagement on a person-to-person basis. "You cannot simply fly in and out and become a satellite office," she says. "You must be based in the country and hire locals to understand the culture and the way they do business."

To further strengthen its business in Asia, La Trobe Financial conducts an international Executive Exchange Scholarship Program. Running since 2010, the program is specifically designed for Chinese financial services professionals to live and work in Australia. The candidates are selected by their employer as a 'future leader' who would like to gain an understanding of the Australian marketplace and develop business contacts. It offers these middle managers access to a range of presentations and meetings with industry specialists, political leaders and government officials. "The Chinese registrants are fully sponsored by their employers, and by offering these individuals the opportunity to live and work in Australia, we hope that they and their employers will develop closer relationships with Australian businesses," Caterina adds.

In the future, La Trobe Financial is looking to expand its position throughout Asia, with potential business opportunities in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Japan. ■