

Staying effective in a challenging world...

MANAGING & DEVELOPING PEOPLE, *the third and final part in the series*

I cannot think of a business where their people are not their most valuable asset. We invest time and money in training them technically, but how much do we invest in the way they use that knowledge? How or do we check their performance?

When we think of a professional like a doctor, what makes him a 'good' doctor? I suggest that medical knowledge is taken for granted and that what counts is what my parents would call 'bedside manner'. Likewise with a teacher, it's not subject knowledge which is crucial but their ability to communicate in an engaging way.

In my experience 'the people issues' are the most common, and often corrosive, problem that a business faces. Whilst the issues come in many different shapes and sizes, as a stark illustration just think about the long running feud between Tony Blair as PM and Gordon Brown his Chancellor. All the time and energy expended, and what better use that might have been put to!

In almost every sphere we promote good practitioners (teachers, professionals and business people) but it does not always follow that they will naturally make good leaders or managers. Much of the problem is not about lacking technical knowledge or professional competence but about the 'softer skills' – not only like Blair and Brown, but in myriad other less dramatic everyday ways.

In the first article in the Autumn Newsletter, I talked of using coaching to improve business effectiveness, and it is a crucial tool in developing people too. I favour 'observational coaching', watching people going about their everyday business holding meetings with clients, bidding for new business, selling, or just how people organise their time and priorities.

Some of the questions we should be asking ourselves:

- Do we formally assess our people every year, review performance (the 'how' as well as the 'what'!), and agree what is needed for the coming year and any development needs?
- Are our people working together or against each other?
- Do we ever 'get on the other side of the desk' – see us as our clients do; are we just doing things to suit us?
- Do we plan and have aims and outcomes for our meetings?
- How many of us reflect after a meeting and honestly ask ourselves could things have gone better, and how we might handle it better?

- Are we doing the urgent tasks or the important tasks?

None of us is perfect; we all have strengths and weaknesses. The objective of coaching is to help people understand themselves and to work with them to improve.

Developing people is not about telling them what to do or how to do it, but rather helping them to grow in awareness, be reflective and to challenge the 'way we always do it'.

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