

Delegation – not Abdication

The time for reviewing staff performance and looking at structures for next season has come rapidly upon us. I'm currently involved with a number of large dairy teams looking at structures to ensure performance, accountability and sustainability. Often this involves reviewing the role of the business owner and balancing what they enjoy against best use of time and sustainability. The importance of this is heightened by an outlook for lower financial returns and a drive for continuous improvement.

Don't Bury the Genius

Establishing where the business owner fits into the team involves considerable thought and balance. A key priority is to achieve the highest return for management time. I often find business owners trapped in \$12/hour roles and missing \$120/hour or \$1200/hour opportunities. A key benefit of business growth is the ability to stand back from operational tasks and focus on management or entrepreneurial activity to accelerate business return.

With this comes a risk of removing the genius from key activities in the business. No doubt it has grown because of a unique skill and high level of commitment from the owners. If this becomes too distant from the day to day operational tasks, there is a risk of declining business return.

Experience tells me that business growth is generally associated with less finesse at a management level. The impact of this can be minimised by formal systems and a planned approach to people management which delivers quality standards and accountability.

Involvement versus Interference

One of the features of delegation is that the business owner or senior manager can stop doing the things they enjoy most. While delegation is important for business progress, remember to retain those things that will provide job satisfaction and control.

Some make the mistake of staying physically involved so they can ensure quality standards. While occasional input is beneficial, reliance on your constant presence at the "coal face" to achieve quality standards tends to undermine or dilute the impact of your delegated management staff. The key here is to establish systems for reporting, communication and operation that ensure you can monitor performance without cutting across or reducing the accountabilities of others.

Accurate job descriptions, regular reviews and approach that store areas of concern for a formal discussion time rather than dealing with them on the spot will be valuable in this regard. Becoming over-involved can see the team constantly looking to you for direction. This transfers to interference. Retaining a measured approach enables you to be aware of what's going on, monitor performance standards without taking away the obligation of your team to perform effectively.

Reviews & Staff Meetings

As with all areas of people management, we need to have an approach whereby the day to day can function without regular “dripping tap” of comment or criticism. This can be negative and destructive but is inevitable if you have no other formal way of dealing with your concerns. Regular meetings with senior team members can set strategies that can be passed on to the rest of the group and enable more effective use of the management structure. Written monthly reports along with daily or weekly opportunities to set priorities and plan use of time are keys for effectiveness.

With the team set on course and the performance measures, accountabilities and strategies clearly communicated, you are free to focus on new opportunity, pursue lifestyle or develop your skills for further business growth.

A role that sees you trapped in operational functions invariably means you will have invested to buy a job rather than a business. With the range of summer recreation, conferences and opportunities for business monitoring, the price you pay for getting this wrong can be significant.

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