KEEP IT SIMPLE STUPID

'Complexity is your enemy. Any fool can make something complicated. It is hard to make something simple' Richard Branson.

The longer I spend running businesses, both for myself and for clients, unravelling complex family structures, mediating in family disputes, helping to improve the profitability of small and medium sized businesses, the simpler I like things to be. 'Keep It Simple Stupid' – (KISS) – is becoming a mantra.

I'm not saying we are stupid, nor that our lives or jobs aren't filled with complexity, but if the overarching aim or process cannot be simply defined then you have clogged your life or business pipeline. There is a rather lovely slurry analogy that I would like to use but as you might be eating your breakfast I'll leave that for another day. Save to say that the more complex you make a slurry system the more likely it is to clog and fail.

When you clog the pipeline several things happen. First and foremost you have limited potential output. Life and business should be about maximising throughput, the amount of quality work you can get through the system will define your success, making the most of life and business.

If you get mired in detail you will lose momentum. By focusing on throughput you can (or should be able to…) simultaneously increase output while reducing cost. Admittedly you need to beware of simplistic thinking. It is possible to get caught up in simple efficiencies rather than looking at the total output. For example, doing something in house to save money and increase efficiencies only works if output doesn't suffer. Avoid granular thinking. Thinking big doesn't mean complicated.

Over-complicating often leads to reactive behaviour or worse still you and the business become lost in the detail. Without a clear aim and a clear set of processes you are more and more likely to become reactive instead of proactive. You get mired in small detail and are unable to get ahead.

Recent long winded discussions surrounding the new formation of a family trust ground to an expensive halt when the structure and processes had spread to over four sheets of A4 and too many lawyers. Frustration and fractious behaviour ensued until we got back to a single sheet of A4 simple enough for Hamish age 9 (he will proudly announce) to explain to his brother Henry (11). Not simplistic but simple.

Business structure and processes should reflect the sort of thinking you want to thrive. There are no instances in life or business where over-engineering is a good thing. If you try to over-engineer, everything will suffer. Over engineering behaves like Couch grass. It creeps in, sometimes over a long period of time and is problematic because the owner/manager of the over-engineered business will have difficulty seeing it. Usually what happens is that someone makes a mistake, and a new rule is put in place to mitigate that problem from ever happening again. Seems logical, but it is a slippery slope. Before you know it you are stuck in it, it is often too late, and once again, designers of the system, Dad, Grandpa, senior manager, will have incredible difficulty seeing it. After all, those rules were all made with good reason...

It is well worth time and money to critically examine processes, bearing in mind the problem that the people who created the problem often can't see it. If you believe your organisation has no problems then you definitely need to bring someone else in to take a look! If that person is competent and despite your best efforts you cannot explain the reason for something happening, then you have got something that needs simplifying. Don't be stubborn and let them poke holes in your flow. Stay out of the slurry and Keep It Simple Stupid.

MARK WEAVER
Director, CLM
T: 01892 770339
www.c-l-m.co.uk

54