

GRASPING THE NETTLE

Often the largest single cost to a business is the people employed within it, and yet the largest common single limiting factor to a business are the people employed within it. No business is perfect, and yet one of the recurring issues we find when approaching a new business to advise (happily a regular occurrence) is that unhappily a lot of the real or perceived issues relate to the people already within it.

Kitchen table, board room, tractor cab in the top paddock, Land Rover bonnet in the yard, eventually somewhere mixed in among the conversations about the exciting projects and succession planning is the hidden throwaway line 'and we need to do something about Ted or Tanya' Often followed up with 'they are very trustworthy, loyal, have been with us a longtime but...' It's the 'but' that gets overlooked as being too difficult an issue to grasp. It's often also the single largest limiting factor in developing the business in the chosen direction of travel. Easier to buy or sell, build or not, sow or not, than actually deal with whether Ted/Tanya is the

right person, in the right place, doing the right thing, for the right money.

In reality it isn't. Effectively managing people is largely a matter of communication. Communication that can and should be delivered in your own style and in your own language. Communicating change – up, out, sideways, better, faster, sometimes slower, the conversation needs to be careful, considered, and rehearsed. Often a little advice on which form of words to use is required, but it doesn't need to be complicated and should always be in plain English. We don't accept mediocrity or under-performance in any other part of our business but for some reason we will endure all kinds of pain from the people we employ. Our own in house HR guru gave me a sideways look recently, asking why we weren't performance managing a clients' staff member we were grumbling about. It is not necessarily a longer process and much easier than the dreaded redundancy, it is a far more positive and rewarding experience all round. Too often, as in this case, we neglect to performance manage our staff until

it's too late, beyond the point when change can hopefully be gradual, and constructive and to the point when change has to be dramatic, stressful, and painful. That is when it really does feel like grasping a nettle.

Before the drill goes back in the barn and before the winter jobs take over or before you all get washed away in the Christmas rush for the holiday let, shoot or farm shop, give yourself the luxury of time to talk properly with your staff. Take notes, share the notes and your considered feedback. Clearing the air in old fashioned terms is never a bad thing, provided you remain inside the bounds of sensible employer behavior and language.

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