

Small Business - Big Goals

You want to grow your business. You've done it before, and grown other people's too – so what's stopping you doing it now?



When you are s o l e l y responsible for running a small business (as millions in the UK are), it can be hard to find someone to turn to when you need to talk through a problem or issue. You can feel

isolated and lonely, reticent about going to a colleague or associate in case it is seen as a sign of weakness.

So where can you go – especially if you're not 100 percent sure what the problem actually is? Well, one place to go to is an Executive Coach. That's what Alan Hughes of PDP Print Management did. He felt it was the right time to speak to someone – Coaching for Success were just the right people to help.

Now he's talking to us about his experience of coaching and what he gained from it.

"I didn't feel right about my business but couldn't quite put my finger on why. I went to see my coach for a couple of sessions – coaching had helped me before. I just went to see if I could find out exactly what was happening; it really began as a general chat with no real objectives.

What became apparent as we were talking things through was the real root of my issue – business growth. My client base needed to expand; I was becoming uncomfortable with having most of my revenue sitting with just a few customers. To feel comfortable and in control again I needed to build up my client base.

We talked about goals – where did I want to take the business to in a year? This also involved visualisation – imagining I was one year on – what did PDP look like now? The

visualisation was great, it really enabled me to see the end result and that in turn gave me confidence to be able to make a start.

To be honest, thinking about what PDP looked like in a year's time was satisfying – it looked quite good. I had increased my client base and was much calmer and more focused. Now I just had to do it for real.

Going through the process with my coach helped me to regain my confidence. The way that information is drawn from you really does make things clear. The key thing for me is that all of the answers are already within you – sometimes you need some help to unlock them, that's all.

The main difference I have felt is in goal setting. My business is in an industry where things change and requirements shift constantly, so I always feel like I am juggling things. Setting aside time to develop new business just never happens – I can always find something else to do!

Coaching helped me to realise the issue – it has to be me that solves it. We talked through a typical day which helped me with improving my time management, and then looked at setting realistic targets to achieve my now obvious objective!

I took every 'no' personally, and that's something else that these sessions have helped me with too. I can now visualise where I want to be, and, with the targets have the confidence to get there.

Since the sessions with my coach I have doubled my client base and am now making the most of every opportunity that comes my way. Coaching for Success has made a real difference to how I approach new business and I'll be back again soon to look for the next challenge."

P.S. Something Alan hasn't mentioned - he had a number one hit in the 60's, ' Good News Week' with his band ' Hedge Hoppers Anonymous' !

You can find Alan and PDP at:
www.pdp-printmanagement.com

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Positive Psychology

Ed: As you can imagine, 'positive psychology' is central to our coaching approach. In the UK we have long been involved with the Personality Strengths project being run by Dr Alex Linly at Leicester University.

Here we reproduce his background newsletter:

What is positive psychology?

Positive psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning. It is about the study of what makes life worth living, and can be succinctly described as the science of happiness and human strengths.

Positive psychology as we know it today was launched by Martin E. P. Seligman, who was President of the American Psychological Association in 1998. Marty Seligman was best known for his work on depression, pessimism, and learned helplessness (i.e., when we persistently fail in something and so give up trying – even when we would succeed if we did keep trying). However, when he was gardening with his daughter, Nikki, he had an “Aha!” moment of realisation. Nikki complained at him for being a grouch, and he realised

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that his grouchiness was a reflection of the work that he did. The more Seligman thought about it, the more he realised that psychology had become a science of illness and pathology, and had neglected studying the things that make life worth living.

Now, when we go back to before the Second World War, psychology had three missions: to cure mental illness, to make the lives of all people more productive and fulfilling, and to identify and nurture high talent. But somehow, somewhere along the way, psychology had forgotten the last two. Seligman decided that his focus as APA President would be to revitalise these lost missions, and he christened the initiative 'positive psychology.'

Of course, it isn't true to say that psychologists had entirely ignored the study of the good things in life, it was just that they were very much preoccupied with the bad things, and people who did study the good things were seen as outsiders. But positive psychology began to change that, and there is now more scientific research and applications being focused on the good things in life than arguably there ever has been before.

So, what sorts of things do positive psychologists study? The two at the top of the list are happiness and human strengths – but they are both huge topics in themselves! Other topics include flow and optimal engagement, wisdom, meaning, positive emotions, and good character, to name but a few. Positive psychologists are also looking at how this knowledge of what makes life worth living can be applied in different settings, especially education and work, and through

practices like psychotherapy and coaching.

But positive psychology isn't just about what you study -- it is also about the way you study it. For example, it is possible to take a 'positive' perspective on the study of lots of different things, and what we would argue is that by taking this positive perspective you learn things that you wouldn't have learned if you only looked at the negatives. For example, you can find out a lot more about why marriages succeed from studying happy marriages than you can by studying why marriages fail. The same is true of leadership – it's much easier to identify reasons why leaders fail than it is to identify reasons why they succeed, but that still doesn't tell us much about leadership success, because all we end up with is a list of 'do not's' rather than a list of 'do's.'

Here are some examples of findings from research in the positive psychology tradition. They make interesting reading, don't they!

People who felt more positive about aging lived 7.5 years longer than people who felt more negative about aging (1).

Being married by age 27, and marital satisfaction at age 52 can be predicted from the smiles of students' photographs in their college / university yearbooks (2).

Nuns who expressed more positive emotions in autobiographical essays in their early twenties were 2.5 times less likely to have died sixty years later than nuns who expressed less positive emotions (3).

This is backed up by other research that shows that people who are happier also tend to be healthier (4).

And just recently, a major review concluded that happiness isn't just an effect of being successful (in all sorts of areas of life) – it is actually a cause of being successful (5).

Ed: You will find the Personality Strengths project at www.personalitystrengths.com - you can take part in the project and complete numerous online personality tests.

(contact us for any required references)

Research

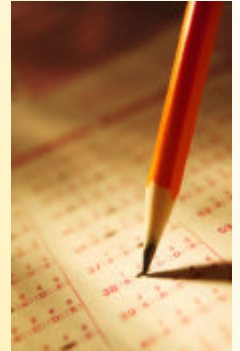
Three-person groups best for problem solving

We know that brainstorming groups are not actually as effective at coming up with creative ideas as individuals but it seems that when it comes to solving problems using logic then 3 is the optimum size for a group.

Researchers tested 760 volunteers on a series of letters-to-numbers tasks requiring logical deduction. The performance of students working alone was compared to 2, 3, 4 & 5 person groups. Two person groups didn't perform any better than students working alone. However, 3, 4 & 5 person groups consistently outperformed the best of 3, 4 & 5 individuals working alone—they were quicker and used more sophisticated methods. However, the bigger groups were no better than the 3 person groups, suggesting 3 is optimum.

The researchers stated that if groups of 3 perform as well as larger ones this represents a more efficient use of human and logistic resources.

Laughlin et al (2006) Jnl personality & social psych.



Beware the Email

If irony / sarcasm are your preferred form of wit, or even if you have a 'dry' sense of humour then beware exercising this in your email correspondence! A research team have been looking into email disasters at work. They conclude that because email is stripped of the extra-linguistic cues such as gesture and intonation, we are overconfident of the reader's interpretation of the intended tone.

Indeed they discovered that our overconfidence is much greater for email than the spoken word. Both parties to the email suffer from this in that the sender assumes the recipient will read it with the intended tone and the recipient is also overconfident in their ability to know what tone was intended. Great scope for misjudging then!



They conclude: "If comprehending human communication consisted merely of translating sentences and syntax into thoughts and ideas, there would be no room for misunderstanding. But it doesn't, and so there is".

Ed: We have heard many instances where email correspondence created a problem relationship. In our view communication channels in descending order of effectiveness would be 1) face-to-face, 2) telephone and 3) email (maybe video calling would come between face-to-face and telephone?)

You get what you expect

There is an old management phrase that "people will give you what you inspect, not what you expect" — from the command & control era? Well perhaps you are actually very likely to get what you expect after all.

The phenomenon of knowing when someone is staring at your back has been quoted as evidence of a sixth sense. However when researched using different researchers results vary according to whether they (the researchers) are sceptics or believers in sixth sense.

Richard Wiseman (sceptic) and Marilyn Schlitz (psychic)



collaborated in an experiment using skin conductance as an objective measure of arousal. People were greeted and shown to a room where, unknown to them, some were stared at via live video link by either Wiseman or Schlitz in another room.

When stared at by Schlitz subjects tended to show greater emotional arousal than when not being stared at. However, when Wiseman did the staring evidence for 'a sense of being stared at' was not found.

We know that teacher's expectations and beliefs about pupil's IQ actually affects the pupil's performance at school so what does all this say about managers' expectations about the abilities of their staff?

The World Cafe



This book 'The World Café; *Shaping Our Future Through Conversations That Matter*', describes a well tested method of generating ideas through collaborative dialogue.

It focuses on creating the right kind of environment to have these conversations, noting that really heart-felt discussion cutting across boundaries of hierarchy etc; takes place most naturally in the relaxed atmosphere of a café. It is about making conversation a core process.

With this in mind great attention is paid to creating a café with small tables where small groups (of up to 5) gather to talk about a specific issue. A key ingredient is having well formed questions to ask the participants at the beginning. They stress questions and not problem statements. So for example a really good world café question set that has been asked is "What would happen if we thought about this differently? What questions are we not asking, that if we did ask, might make our situation better?"

The questions are discussed in the small groups with a host at each table, whose job is to facilitate and encourage people to draw and write on the white paper table cloths. After an agreed period guests move to another table and join the host who uses the drawings and notes left behind to explain what the other guests had discussed. These thoughts are then added to by this new group.

A number of well known corporations, such as Hewlett-Packard & Philip Morris, have already embraced this method of stimulating dialogue between staff at all levels.

Also, World Café meetings have been held for both large and small groups. In a chapter headed 'Creating a Hospitable Space', the authors describe an event held by Saudi Aramoco in an aircraft hanger decorated with hundreds of Arabian carpets and serving lamb & rice for refreshment for the seven hundred delegates!

There are many more important aspects to the running of successful World Cafes and all are well covered in the book.

World Café; Juanita Brown & David Isaacs; Berrett-Koehler publishers. (Available via Amazon link on our website)

Coaching for Success DVD

We have recently produced a short interactive DVD of several clients being interviewed by the TV presenter Penny Mallory, about their experience of working with a coach.

Featured clients range from the head chef of The Fat Duck restaurant to the Projects Director of John Laing. They describe the kind of goals they brought to the process and the value they found from working on them with a professional coach.

For a free copy (which can be useful to encourage others of the benefits and positive nature of coaching) just drop us a line at DVD@coachingforsuccess.co.uk



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About us

Coaching for Success provides executive and personal coaching that helps individuals perform to their maximum potential.

Our corporate client list covers a range of industry sectors, including pharmaceutical, retail, finance and construction, and high profile names such as John Laing, Novartis, KPMG, Abbott and Johnson Controls.

Our coaches work with company personnel, on a one-to-one basis, enabling them to recognise the choices and opportunities available to them, to make decisions about career and personnel development and then to create and implement a plan of action designed to achieve success.

We provide professional coaching in the areas of:

- Executive Coaching
- Life Coaching
- Performance Coaching