

CLOSE-UP

How I made a difference at work

Steve Dewey, AA road operations director, talks about a leadership development initiative



A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF CHANGE DURING 2004-05, challenging targets and a flatter management structure made a compelling case for a step change in my team's performance in 2007. The previous three years had seen rapid change and a refocus on improving customer service and day-to-day efficiencies.

MY TEAM IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ENTIRE BREAKDOWN SERVICE, including call centres and patrols.

However, I didn't think there was true alignment within the team and we weren't spending enough time thinking about how effective we were at working together. We needed more cohesion – otherwise we were at risk of undoing some of our good work.

ALL THIS CONVINCED ME THAT WE REQUIRED EXTERNAL SUPPORT.

This came in the form of Richard Lowe, managing director of HR & Training Solutions Ltd, who was brought

in to facilitate a Best Year Yet (BYY) team programme.

BYY is a fast-track programme to get leadership or management teams to share and bring together key leadership disciplines to run their business more effectively and improve results.

For me the strength in this programme, as opposed to other options such as coaching, lay in the fact that it was directly linked to our business plans and results.

It also included a monthly review process to ensure alignment on monthly objectives, accountability and track progress on embedding leadership team disciplines.

YOU HAVE TO BE OPEN-MINDED WHEN RUNNING THIS TYPE OF PROGRAMME.

There was anticipation and excitement from the team about doing something so different, which meant responding to that in an encouraging way was crucial.

OUR PROGRAMME BEGAN WITH A TWO-DAY OFF-SITE EVENT to produce a BYY plan. We included HR and finance business partners in this because support for our plan was essential.

The process gave us time to reflect as a team and create a road map for achieving our goals over the coming year, commitments for performance improvement and a shared understanding of key leadership principles we needed to adopt.

FOLLOWING THE AWAY DAY we used a web-based tool that supported the team in delivering the plan: it kept our priorities in clear view and therefore "on our radar" all the time.

In addition, the monthly review meetings were, and continue to be, greatly valued. The biggest benefit for me personally has been networking with the team to give me an understanding of who is delivering what – which can also prevent work overload.



LESSONS LEARNT

- ◆ If you are considering a Best Year Yet (BYY) programme for your business or team, be clear about what you want to achieve and allow the BYY facilitator to work with you and the team to get the results required.
- ◆ Be committed and open minded, as there is something in the process for everyone.
- ◆ Make sure your team prepare in advance of each review meeting for a more effective result.
- ◆ Rigorous objective setting is key.

THE GREATEST OVERALL ADVANTAGE OF IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAMME

has been a strengthened focus on planning. It also ensured our plan was robust and flexible enough to accommodate change.

In an operational team, planning can get neglected because you're so busy with the day-to-day job. However, the BYY approach provided clarity around what we had to deliver and improved the team's interaction with each other. It also gave us greater foresight and judgment, which continue to positively influence our business results.

In addition, I believe this work contributed directly to us being classed as the best breakdown service provider by *Which?* during 2007. But most importantly, the team's sharper focus improved our efficiency and financial performance above and beyond what I had expected. The return on investment looks simply ridiculous – we're talking millions of pounds plus a direct impact on our customer results. A great way to finish what was a breakthrough year. ■

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