



DRIVING FORCES

Adding peak performance to business practice

NEWSLETTER

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Know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em.

In a recent newsletter (Spring 2009) I discussed how to get the best out of consultants.

This newsletter is a follow up to that one. It is about how to get the best from your consultant's report.

I have written many reports over the years for a variety of organisations on a wide range of subjects. What often surprises me is they are often accepted by the client at face value with minimal (or indeed, no) due diligence. And yet some of the deeper insights come from the author's informal comments.

To get the best from your consultant's report the following is suggested:

Read it at least twice:

- First, to ensure it complies with the terms of reference, that it provides answers/solutions to the issues being addressed, there are no gaps and it can be implemented politically and financially.
- Secondly, to fully understand/comprehend what it says in the context of when it was written and its implications to the parties concerned.

Having read the report discuss with the consultant the evidence and reasons behind its findings, how conclusions and recommendations have been reached and assumptions made.

Invite the consultant to present and discuss it with the parties most affected, beginning with the organisation's board. This is their opportunity to do due diligence on the report.

In particular ask the consultant how they would implement the report and over what timeframe. Competent consultants have a clear idea about this but surprisingly many are seldom asked and even fewer are asked to implement it.

The implementation process begins with a project plan and budget. It would be prudent to ask the consultant to assess/peer review it on the grounds they will have firsthand knowledge of the issues involved.

Even though they are not obliged to do so, many consultants follow the implementation of their reports out of professional interest. If so take the opportunity to inform them of issues, if any, arising from it. It is possible they may have a suggestion or solution that will ease the way to the next stage of the process.

Remember, clients benefit immensely from the fact their consultants have built up a body of knowledge from working across a wide range of businesses and not for profit organisations. It's highly likely your issues are not so unique that they have not been experienced before.

Some clients involve their consultants in the mid and at the end of the implementation and review process. Although this is a judgment call it can be beneficial to both parties particularly if it is expected the consultant will be contracted to do more work.

Finally, a word to those who plan to contract a consultant: in the course of my work I have seen reports (sometimes up to half a dozen) that have been done for the same organisation on the same or similar subject.

Frankly this is a waste of client's money and consultant's time. If you are unsure you need a

consultant then in all probability you don't so save your money until you do.

Like the song says - know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em.....

The ring of fire

Local business awards are designed to encourage and acknowledge business excellence. In the case of Kapiti – Horowhenua they are sponsored by Electra (electricity lines company). They have run for a number of years and are reviewed regularly to see how they can be improved.

The 2009 Awards were no exception and as a result a number of improvements and new ideas have been implemented.

One of them was the introduction of a case study of the overall winner of the Business of the Year Award. In 2009 it was Turks Poultry Farm Ltd (refer www.turkspoultry.com.nz).

The case study chose not to use a pre determined template as this would stifle Turk's story, the way they wanted to tell it and their emphasis on what they considered to be important to their business success. Rather, it let the story unfold in its own way, the way Turk's wanted to tell it – warts and all.

It told the story of a business that had entered the Awards before and what they had learnt from that experience including the fact -

“Although we felt we were in good shape we found we were not as competitive as we thought.”

As a result they learnt more about their business, where it stood compared to previous winners, what they needed to do to improve their performance and how they could leverage the award process to improve their business.

“The preparation requires you to take a hard look yourself, your strengths and your weaknesses, your strategies, operations and decision making which in turn helps to make the business more successful”.

The case study details how they won the premier award, what they did to improve their governance and operating practices, the importance of training for all personnel – CEO through to staff at every level, their investment in R & D to improve productivity, management of critical environmental, health and

safety issues and the improvement in their bottom line as a consequence of managing all of these factors well.

They realised that a single strategy seldom produced the desired result. Indeed, they found it took a number of integrated strategies to achieve sustained results and to set the business on a long term growth path. The result was what was described as a “total performance package”.

The case study has been circulated to other businesses primarily for its learnings, but also as a source of inspiration (if at first you do not succeed.....), as an indicator of how best practice standards can be practically applied and as a realistic benchmark of what it takes to be successful in business (refer www.electra.co.nz/businessawards).

Drivingforces believes there is a very strong case for not for profit organisations to develop their own case studies. Past experience shows there are many interesting and instructive stories waiting to be told.

The best advice money can buy.....

Drivingforces has been involved with a number of far sighted people in setting up a business advisory board.

A business advisory board is a group of experienced business people who offer high quality, independent advice to the owner operators of small – medium size business entities on how they can take the next step in the development of their business.

Advisory boards have proven to be an invaluable resource that in many instances complements the work done by the organisation's external advisors.

The next newsletter will discuss how they work and how organisations can get the most from them.

“Real leaders create aspirational visions and impart life values; administrators do not. Which category applies to you – leader or administrator?” – Chris Ineson - opening statement to a leadership course.



“A desire for Peak Performance is the force that must drive every successful organisation.”

For further information about Drivingforces contact Chris Ineson at www.drivingforces.co.nz