

Case study - The Willoughby Book Club



The customer

The Willoughby Book Club is the UK's leading tailored book subscription service offering a personalised book selection, gift wrapped and delivered to your door on a monthly basis.

? The problem

One of the Directors had been an employee of Willoughby and had recently bought out the previous owner. She hadn't run a business before, and she hadn't led people before. Her co-Director was a friend who had previous experience as a manager in a book retail environment. However, she lived in Ireland and came over to work on-site about ten days a month.

We held an initial scoping meeting to understand the areas and specific issues that the Directors wanted support to work on.

Whilst there was a strong sense of pride in Willoughby, there was generally low self-confidence across the business and some staff were resistant to the change of ownership.

The Directors wanted help with leadership and people management skills, business strategy and processes. Under the previous ownership the employees had received little, if any, personal or team development.



The solution



I provided a package of monthly support for a six-month period. Appropriate dates were set each month and the areas of focus for each session was flexible and depended on what was important to the Directors and the business at the time.

A mix of support solutions was provided. These solutions ranged from coaching and mentoring sessions with the Directors as individuals and together, through to development sessions with the full team of employees.

Some examples of areas we addressed and interventions I delivered over the six-month period were:

- Individual Director coaching on their leadership and management style and approach, including sharing tools and techniques
- Working through how to deal with specific difficult situations and issues
- Developing Willoughby's business vision and set of values
- Full team workshop on the behaviours needed to bring the values to life and encourage engagement
- Business strategy development ideas and goals
- Developing thoughts on possible organisation structures
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities between the two Directors
- Ideas for process improvements
- Identifying the Directors' skills and competencies and creating individual development plans
- Full team workshop to build confidence by recognising successes, unused skills, team strengths, what they value about Willoughby and each other, how to build on strengths and successes and use them to take the business forward
- Design of a communication session, delivered by the Directors, to all employees to update on progress and future plans



The results



The Directors developed significantly at a personal level and made substantial progress on the fundamentals of the business and its strategy. During the time spent with The Willoughby Book Club we produced the following:

- A clear and simple vision statement for the business and why it exists
- A set of six business values and an associated set of supporting behaviours, defined by the employees that they would work to
- A business strategy, set of goals and created a Business Model Canvas for the main customer group
- Increased employee engagement and confidence through involvement in two workshops. The employees gave very positive feedback to the Directors following the team workshops and wanted more sessions. This was after several of them were initially concerned and uncomfortable about taking part
- Tools, techniques and approaches to deal with some specific employee situations



Why they chose me

We had an initial meeting to build our relationship and explore the business's issues and how I may be able to work with them to resolve them. During the sessions I used my coaching, mentoring, training and facilitation skills. I used my workshop design and delivery skills for specific interventions and brought business development tools and techniques to help build the business foundations. I used appropriate personal development tools, techniques and frameworks for individual development activities.



What did they say?



“2019 was a whirlwind of a year - I went from being an employee of The Willoughby Book Club to being a co-director with only three months to get my head around the idea. Throw in a fire that destroyed our previous premises just before we took over (meaning a move to new premises), well, it was a fairly stressful start to the year! While I knew my job within the company and the framework of how it operated, when it came to heading a company and being responsible for 9 employees, along with venturing into business ownership with a close friend, I was a complete novice and felt a huge sense of imposter syndrome.

“Through the LLEP my business partner and I were introduced to Andrew Deighton and after an initial meeting decided to commit to 6 months of support from him (AWD Development Solutions). Throughout our time with Andrew he helped us enormously; from support with writing business goals and strategy planning, to team building, growth and personal development, I benefitted hugely from my sessions with Andrew and feel his help in creating a stronger and more stable workplace has been invaluable. It was with sadness we said goodbye to Andrew at the end of our 6 months, but I am confident we will continue to build on the skills he has given us and that we will work together again at some point in the future. Thank you Andrew!”

Danielle Rowley, Co-Director, The Willoughby Book Club Ltd.