

# Keeping it Real

Winter 07/08

**Minerva**   
be do win

# Talk and chalk bites the dust

**The way people learn is changing dramatically at Britannia, says its Group Management Development Manager, Andy Woodcock.**

Most large companies these days (including my own) have a single corporate plan; a single brand; a single vision and a single set of values.

Yet...very few companies have a single seat of organisational learning and development that really works – and which is integrated with the wider objectives of the business such as our corporate given of Britannia being “a great place to work, grow and develop.”

We were often as guilty of this lack of integration as the next financial services company on the block.

Management development in our organisation had been far too fragmented and polarised, with various outside vendors being used to train our people, each with their own values, cultures and methods of evaluation.

Added to this, we were faced with all the usual pressures in our industry: Smarter more empowered consumers, a shrinking talent pool, the need to integrate new people from various acquisitions, increasing legislation – and new competition from unlikely sources like supermarkets.

## **Biting the bullet**

We decided about two years ago to bite the bullet and build a single Britannia Management Academy that would be compulsory for our top 1,000 managers. It would give them all the usual management development skills needed to do their jobs better, but importantly:

- It would not just be an in-house sheep dip
- All modules would be integrated to form a joined-up approach with common themes such as Emotional Intelligence
- The style of learning would be interactive, fun and memorable
- Most importantly, learning and its application would have a direct correlation to the business.

Some 24 months later the results we're seeing are proving our decision correct. We're on the road to having a consistent quality of leadership through a standard set of definitions, common models, language, training process and evaluation that can be regularly applied across all business units.

## **Bygone days**

The days of “talk and chalk” style classroom-based training where everyone was told what to learn, sat quietly, made a few notes in their pads and then returned to the ‘real world’ (only to forget virtually everything they learned) are now well and truly over.

As are the days of not knowing whether training was making a difference to performance and results or indeed whether we were even getting a decent return on our investment. Now we have tools in place to measure the impact on the business.

## **Hearts and minds**

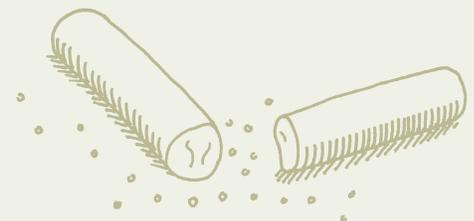
Winning hearts and minds is one of those phrases that's very easy to say but very difficult to do. However, some 98% of managers have confirmed the modules they've taken through our academy have either met or exceeded their personal development objectives. As we all know, engagement of this kind isn't half the battle...it's all the battle.

At the end of the day, it's all about performance – which is why we are literally testing and accrediting people based on what they learn and how they subsequently apply it in the workplace.

When all's said and done we are a business. What's more, we want to stay in business.

Andy Woodcock

Group Management Development Manager  
Britannia Building Society



# It's good to share



At this moment you're probably asking yourself, "What is *Keeping it Real*?" "Why have I been sent a copy?", and "Why isn't this an e-newsletter?"

Before I answer all those questions let's just get the cheerleading briefly out of the way: Next year (2008) marks the 10th anniversary of Minerva.

Today, we're working with some of Europe's largest companies on major change and organisational initiatives, whilst staying true to our roots of improving performance through people. In fact, as recently as November 2007 we picked up our fourth NTA award (and 7th in total) for our work with the newly demutualised Standard Life.

It's been quite a ride. And like most good journeys, the scenery has often been as exciting as the journey itself – which is really the essence of why we decided to produce *Keeping it Real*.

## People, people, people

One of the biggest challenges for us has been finding a suitable forum to capture thoughts, share experiences, and exchange, opinions and knowledge.

*Keeping it Real* is our attempt at doing just that, in a grown-up way. That means stripping away much of the armour with which the world of business traditionally clads itself, and getting to the heart of the real issues - whilst retaining a sense of humour.

Here's what we *won't* do:

- Waste your time with corporate platitudes
- Spout the latest HR jargon and gobbledegook
- Tell you how great we are
- Bury you with pages and pages of content
- Add to already bulging in-trays with an e-newsletter

## Call me old-fashioned...

This last point is a key one. In our experience, it's hard to get excited by an e-newsletter. It gets glanced at, filed in the email archive with all good intentions of reading it at a later date...and then subsequently buried by the next avalanche of electric mail, forgotten forever.

This is a shame because there seems to be a genuine content gap out there. Ultimately, our industry loves to use complex methodologies, theories and language at the expense of tackling the real issue that sits at the heart of all organisational change and development...*people*.

If there's one quality that is traditionally valued above all others in business it is rationality. Emotional involvement, on the other hand (which we've proved is the real key to making change programmes and performance improvement stick) is sometimes seen as a weakness. In most big organisations people still check in a big part of their 'aliveness' when they come to work – even though it's the very thing that has the power to transform their experience of meaning, contribution and satisfaction. Meanwhile the organisation is working hard to create greater staff engagement...

Somewhere down the line organisations decided to value what someone does at the expense of *who they are*.

*Keeping it Real* aims to try and address these and a slew of other issues in a useful, succinct and possibly even entertaining way. In our experience, no matter what's said, few senior managers get the time to really think about things, poke their heads out of their foxholes, learn from others outside their organisation and engage in that 'blue sky thinking' that is talked about so often.

This is an opportunity to at least have a go.

*ALoveless*

Andy Loveless, Minerva

[www.minerva-int.com](http://www.minerva-int.com)

# 4x4

News has reached us that T-mobile has set up a Facebook 'group' for all its latest graduate recruits to help them get to know each other. Minerva didn't go that far, but we have ourselves been recruiting – when not answering emails, that is. Meanwhile, in the workplace, we're continuing to see the same old problems of ill-equipped managers failing to manage. Ho hum...

## **Is there still a 'War for Talent'?**



We've just been recruiting and I can say categorically that the answer is 'yes'. We saw quite a few people from the public sector; they were desperate to make a difference...but their skills weren't right for us. We also saw some very capable consultants, but there wasn't quite the right chemistry. Eventually we found what we wanted, but it took longer than anyone thought.



From the stories I hear, it's more about companies getting their processes and thinking in place when it comes to recruitment. It still amazes me how recruitment processes can be so haphazard and badly managed, even at the biggest companies, for fairly senior roles.



A big part of the problem is that recruiters don't always know what they want. Also, this word 'talent' is a red herring. So much of finding the right fit is based on corporate culture, and creating an environment where people are valued and are allowed to be more creative in finding ways to make things better.



As we all know, many large companies now have 'talent managers', but for me it's another example of semantics. The word 'talent' has a rather impersonal, commoditised feel to it. It's corporate speak; inside out rather than outside in.

## **Social networking: The future?**

It's not even part of my present. I don't have time for it and can't really see the point in having virtual friends when most of us are struggling to keep up with our real ones. It seems a bit indulgent to me...does that make me the official humbug of the month?

Not really for me. I genuinely feel that a lot of people on Facebook and other social networks are there because they don't feel acknowledged in their regular lives. That's why it's so important to have more friends than anyone else...but really, what's the point? However I will be trying it myself to see what is the fascination...you never know I might become a convert!

It definitely has its uses as a tool for finding people you've lost contact with, and staying in touch. The implications for the workplace are interesting. If you forbid staff from using Facebook in their lunch hour are you breaching their human rights? From an employers perspective why should staff be allowed to use the tools you provide them with (ie a PC) for their own amusement?

I really don't have much of an opinion, suffice to say it's not something I'm involved in. Though having said that, I have been on the Facebook site to see if some of my friends and acquaintances are on it!



### **Too much email?**

I read a recent poll that claimed 86% of all business communication is now done through email. Way too much! People are now having official 'email amnesty days' when they refuse to read email you send them! Email was meant to solve a communication challenge. It has actually created one.

Nowhere near enough effort is put into thinking about the response we want to achieve from an email. It feels to me that lots of email is about covering backsides and putting stuff 'on the record'. By sending an email it seems we are able to effectively abdicate our responsibilities.

It's used as an excuse for inefficiency and low productivity. Everyone spends so much time attending to their email! It's also a smokescreen for supervisors and managers to avoid talking to and engaging their staff about the issues that count, which of course are often crucial but not always easy conversations.

It can actually become not just exhausting but all consuming. We're all slaves to email to a certain extent; people come into work in the morning, switch on the PC and just get sucked into the email vortex! What then happens is we let email set priorities for the day. Not good. The key is realising that sometimes email is actually a substitute for communication rather than the real thing.

### **Why aren't managers managing?**

Often it's simply down to avoiding confrontation. We've recently talked to managers who were marking their people at 4 out of 5 when the actual experience of the customer was nowhere near that. Why? They didn't want to be unpopular or rock the boat. It can be summarised in one word: fear.

I think a bigger problem is follow-through. Managers receive training but it needs to be reinforced, otherwise everyone reverts back to a 'business as usual' mindset, which is all about ticking boxes – not making a difference. Sometimes you just need a bit of help and cajoling to keep it happening.

We still see a lot of managers that either don't have the skills to do the job, or are simply not the right kind of people to do the job. It comes back to the old maxim that a wonderful salesperson doesn't make a great sales manager. The skill sets are entirely different – and can only be taught to a certain extent...

Too often, managers are not taught to manage – or set goals or objectives. Furthermore, because we can all talk and write it's assumed we're all great communicators – not true. Plus it's the fear factor. After all, you're responsible for people's productivity and wellbeing! When I was first a team leader, I was terrified and really needed help in learning how to structure things, as well as coaching on how to inspire, motivate, support my team.

**Andy Loveless**

**Melvyn Renison**

**Michael Anglin**

**Jane Anglin**

# News

## The good (People Management)

During the midst of the postal strike, Allan Leighton, Chairman of the Royal Mail, struck a blow for those of us who believe in plain speaking when he issued a brief video address to staff that has subsequently been riding high in the youtube charts.

“Some of the things I've done have not been popular but the one thing we've always done with you, is we're no bulls\*\*t and we're straight.”

He continued: “Whether we have a strike or not there will be change. There is no option. If there is a strike, then we will lose more business and that will put us under more pressure. Strikes are things of the past, things of the 70s, things of the dinosaur; not things of today.”

Wow. That's what we call plain speaking.

In a subsequent interview with People Management magazine, Leighton warmed to this theme. “There's a lot of mumbo jumbo out there. HR isn't responsible for the people in the company. Managers are the ones who are responsible.”

Or at least, they should be.

## The bad (The Independent)

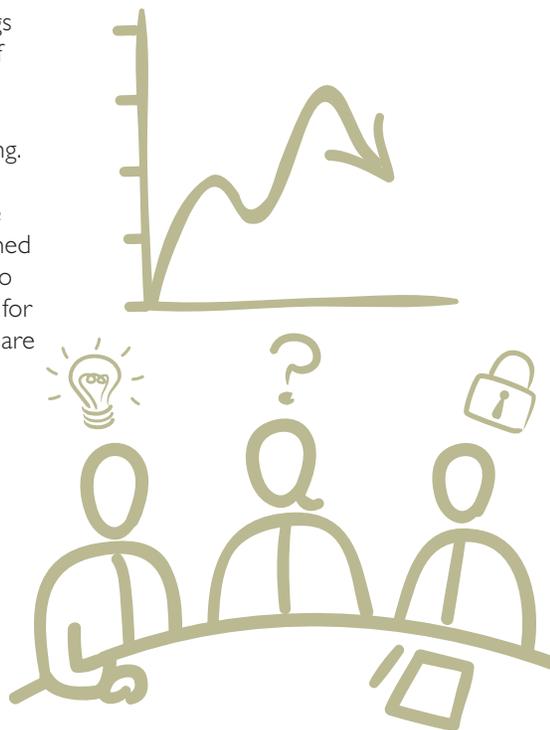
The UK has plummeted from second to ninth place in the world league table for competitiveness according to the World Economic Forum. Our excessive rates of tax and the regulations surrounding taxation are cited as major factors. However, the other chief factors cited are even more worrying...

“An inadequately trained workforce with a poor work ethic is also apparently a reason for steering clear of the UK...although the UK can take some comfort from being well ahead of France.”

## The ugly (Alan Mitchell writing in Marketing Week)

Recent research by the Manchester Business School has found that there is 'zero evidence' of any link between happy staff and happy customers (which is rather worrying bearing in mind they spoke to a mammoth 1 0,000 people). There was another resounding message to come out of the research, namely that the biggest motivation for better customer service comes not from head office policies and directives...but from within. Who'd have thought it?

“Living the brand can have a touch of the totalitarian about it. For employees, fulfilling a job description isn't enough anymore. Now the corporation wants to control their thoughts and feelings – their very lives too. Thus many 'live the brand' programmes introduce all manner of 'brainwashing' under the guise of internal branding and 'culture change' while pushing rewards and incentives into new and inappropriate areas of employee behaviour, such as 'helpfulness' or 'cheerfulness'. The net result can be a resurgence of discredited command and control styles of management, just as the rest of the organisation tries to wean itself off them.”



# Not all marriages are made in heaven

A recent report by the Hay group found that 91% of M&As failed to meet their objectives due to the culture shock of two competing organisations.

Think of the amount of time, money and resource that goes into the average Merger & Acquisition (M&A).

Enormous sums are spent on back office integration, IT, scenario modelling, branding and marketing - and rightly so. Our understanding of the material management aspect of M&A has grown vastly in recent years for the simple reason they are absolutely fundamental to success.

But what about people? The humble folk who – at the end of the day – will be thrown together, unsure of their role and invariably worried for their jobs, and told to make it work. 'People are our greatest asset' is of course one of the abiding clichés of our industry, but scratch beneath the veneer and when it comes to M&A it's nothing more than an empty slogan.

## M&A equals change

The average M&A can best be described as one giant Change Management programme. The one thing we know about change is that it unsettles people. And the one thing we know about unsettled people is that they aren't very effective workers.

This is all rather unfortunate bearing in mind that shareholder value is essentially what drives all M&As.

So what can be done about it?

## The 7 habits of highly effective M&As

Of course, there are no shortcuts. Perish the thought, However, there are seven basic steps to success.



1. Get full acceptance that the organisation is going to embark on a two-year people change programme – because that's how long it will take, trust us.
2. Commit the investment, authority and resources needed to support this type of people change programme.
3. Assemble and empower the team before the M&A is actually finalised and announced. Getting key people onside will be hugely influential in what is communicated, especially internally.
4. Have the team devise a detailed people change and integration strategy and plan.
5. Give full authority to this team to direct the people change on behalf of the company. This will mean the inclusion of board members to the group.
6. Commit, top-down, to personal change. Change is not something that happens to other people, it starts at the top and needs to be embodied, not just talked about.
7. Most importantly – communicate, engage with and listen to your people. Constantly. Authentically. Top-to-bottom. No exceptions.

## It's obvious

Like a lot of what we consultants do, this may all sound a little... obvious. But the fact is that very few companies do it – hence the bad press that seems to hang around M&As like a bad smell.

Those that do, truly will reap the benefits, through maintaining and hopefully improving their BAU, reaching or bringing forward pay-back dates, improving confidence and loyalty amongst all staff, radically reducing costs and delivering a better customer experience.

All in all, that seems like a worthwhile investment to me; and we have several clients who can vouch for that, including Nationwide Building Society (through their acquisition of the Portman Building Society) and Britannia (when they bought Bristol and West).

*So what do you think?  
We'd love to hear from you.*

*Why not pick up the phone and do it the  
old-fashioned way?*

*Call Andy on 01908 508050*

**Minerva** 

Minerva House  
Shirwell Crescent  
Furzton Lake  
Milton Keynes  
MK4 1GA, UK

P +44 (0)1908 50 80 50  
F +44 (0)1908 50 80 60  
E [enquiries@minerva-int.com](mailto:enquiries@minerva-int.com)  
W [www.minerva-int.com](http://www.minerva-int.com)



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