

Coaching for improvement: self-awareness amongst leaders

The company was owned and managed by one person, supported by a small team of senior staff. Whilst the business had been moderately successful, the owner felt that time and management attention was taken up by 'employee problems'. The owner invited Barker Dewson to investigate and suggest ideas to develop staff/management relations and improve business performance.

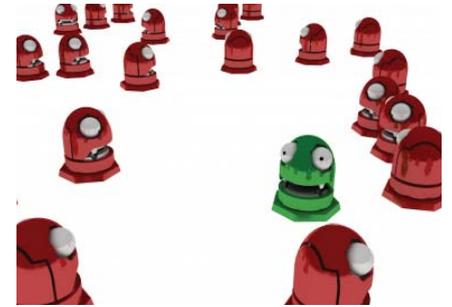
Barker Dewson conducted confidential interviews with all staff, and invited selected managers, including the owner, to complete a psychometric questionnaire. The results showed that the staff were engaged, committed and highly skilled, but were confused by the company strategy, and found the behaviour of the owner 'wildly inconsistent'.

The psychometric data showed that the owner and one of the managers had very low self-awareness and little understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the staff. Analysis showed that they had fostered a blame culture which made staff unwilling to accept responsibility, take risks, or suggest new innovations. At first, the owner rejected these findings, but coaching and facilitated conversations with partners and two key customers enabled the owner to realise that there was more to the data than he was at first prepared to admit.

The company experienced a six-week period in which a senior manager and two staff left. However, with additional coaching and selection advice from Barker Dewson, the owner and the management team appointed two non-executive directors, who acted as 'critical friends' and arbitrated over any conflict. The ownership of the company was also changed, with a portion of shares distributed among the staff, allowing them a greater voice in decision-making.

After 12 months, Barker Dewson repeated the confidential interview process and found a marked change in culture and mood among both staff and managers. In his annual report to the board, the owner commented,

"...whilst this last year has been challenging, both for the business, and for me personally, I'm pleased with the progress we have made and by our approach to the management of conflict – without blame."



The business returned to profit in 2008, and staff turnover fell for the first time in five years – from 30% to just 5%