

Smart Talk

Insights from
entrepreneurs

Smart Talk is a weekly column by successful entrepreneurs about their daily challenges. This week, Michael Sherlock, a co-founder of Brumby's Bakeries and co-author of *Jumpshift!*, explains how feedback can improve everyone's performance.

● One of the more important moments in the journey of Brumby's Bakeries concerned the unexpected consequences of "personality profiling" the executive TEAM (Together Everyone Achieves More) members. As we approached the first anniversary of our planning workshop, I decided that we would undertake some profiling of the TEAM at our regular quarterly meeting in addition to reviewing progress towards our goals.

My *Jumpshift!* co-author, Alan Anderson, the consultant who had facilitated the initial planning meeting, was also responsible for organising part of this quarterly meeting. Alan chose the Team Management Systems (TMS) approach to individual and team profiling as the vehicle for team building. The idea appealed to me as a bit of fun that might enhance TEAM building. Little did I realise what it would lead to.

TMS, established in 1985, is Australian owned and operated and recognised globally as a leading integrated system of work-focused, research-proven assessments and feedback instruments. The non-judgemental TMS labels mean participants are not competing with each other for the "best profile" as there is no such thing. It is more about identifying, harnessing and leveraging team and organisational diversity.

Each member of the executive TEAM completed the TMS online questionnaire, which reveals the type of work they prefer to do and how they prefer to do it. The responses generated a 5000-word self-report, which detailed leadership strengths, decision-making approaches, interpersonal skills, preferred team-building roles and work preferences.

Of significant practical value in the report is the section on an individual's preferred communication style and how to optimise understanding through specific behavioural communication strategies. For example, the role of a "controller-inspector" usually would benefit from short, decisive discussions, whereas the "creator-innovator" role prefers to think out loud and discuss and explore their ideas before coming to a conclusion. Having the participants discuss these differences in workplace

behaviour and then agree on some effective communication strategies, has led to communication breakthroughs and improved team harmony.

At the workshop, Alan explained how the system worked and the theory behind the models. He then handed out the reports for the participants to read. Initially, however, I refused to accept my profile. "That's not me," I said. Alan suggested that I ask my colleagues to review my profile and provide feedback. It wasn't too long before my colleagues were telling me, "That's you to a tee!" It took two weeks for me to finally admit that the profile was a true reflection of my preferred working style.

So TMS had challenged my belief that I was a "thruster organiser" and not the creative person the assessment revealed. When the team affirmed that I was a creative person, it gave me confidence to be more creative in the business, especially with respect to marketing, so the creative side became more of a core trait than a side issue. I backed my own judgements more, especially on branding, for example insisting on, in spite of opposition from the marketing and advertising "experts", the addition of the word "Bakery" after the Brumby's brand and logo because I didn't want any confusion about the name. I wanted it to be "blatantly obvious".

On reflection, TMS helped me identify my own and others' strengths and work preferences and I reorganised our TEAM around these. This reorganisation meant my general manager, Steve Brown, took responsibility for the operations of the company in line with his TMS profile and I focused on branding, marketing and new products and we really delegated more effectively. Our growth accelerated because we had the right people in the right seats on the bus.

So take the helicopter view – find out your company's TEAM members' strengths and work preferences and really delegate, don't just do it on paper.

My recommendation is to do some work preference profiling and take action in accordance with those insights.

Your TEAM will have a better culture, you will have better retention of the TEAM members you want to keep. Strive to be an employee of choice and more people will be effective as they will be playing to their strengths and the results will follow. **BRW**

Next week: Kogan founder and Milan Direct co-founder Ruslan Kogan

MICHAEL SHERLOCK ON TAKING FEEDBACK



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