



Building a winning culture

By Michael Sherlock
Co-author of *Jumpshift!*

If you're having fun, you've already won.

Once your bakery is on the growth journey and starting to show promising results, you need to review your progress against your strategic business plan (SBP) to keep your business on course. The key is to hold regular meetings with your senior people to build a winning culture in your team so they develop an 'owner's eye'.

Regular/quarterly meetings

An important component of working *on* your bakery not *in* the bakery is to hold regular (I suggest quarterly) meetings with your senior team to assess progress with the SBP, and to decide whether it needs tweaking to remain relevant to changing business conditions. This is the time to drill down into the details of what has been promised to see what's been achieved and to reinforce individual and team accountabilities.

The most effective way to build this culture of accountability during the quarterly meetings is to have each head of department present a review of the past quarter against what they said they would achieve compared to budget and an outline of their next 90-day commitments for action.

At Brumby's we took the whole senior team – together with key suppliers – on a quarterly retreat; usually to a resort venue. We deliberately went into different markets and undertook added value training for the local franchisees. This approach was part of a philosophy of gaining maximum value from travel expenditure.

The usual routine for these retreats involved

all arriving the night before and spending two quality, uninterrupted days working through the SBP to establish priorities and common focus for the next quarter.

The fun factor

The quarterly retreats really worked in that everyone looked forward to them as part of the "be in the moment and enjoy the experience" approach. Without their family responsibility around them, the managers became closer as a group of friends who could let off steam together, get to know each other better and bond.

We incorporated celebration of success along the journey with reward activities such as rock concerts (including the Rolling Stones, The Eagles and James Taylor), canoeing, clay pigeon pistol shooting, abseiling, rock climbing, paragliding, tai chi and horse riding. From my perspective, the rock concerts were part of the fun factor and a culture of having fun at work so that fun after work was a continuation of the experience – a mucking around philosophy based on the idea that you're only young once but you can act youthfully any time you like (and don't take yourself too seriously).

Once when the team went canoeing I noticed that one pair couldn't paddle together and one of them decided to walk back instead. I used that observation to reinforce the need to understand other's strengths and weaknesses and show more patience and tolerance.

At the pistol shooting one of the managers just couldn't hit the target and some others

observed that if he did have a gun, the safest thing would be to stand still! That manager was just like that in meeting quarterly targets, so the FIFO (fit in or ...) principle soon kicked in.

Relations with suppliers

I realised the importance of linking our suppliers into the quarterly meetings (and the business more generally) because in most cases they became unpaid loyal members of our team. The outcomes were strongly positive because we received assistance with new product development, access to their market research and consumer trends. We were also given first preference with new product launches they were planning because they understood the needs of our business intimately.

So in order to drive improved business performance in your bakery, I suggest you develop a winning culture through well constructed quarterly meetings to review and maintain your SBP that are challenging yet fun and forge strong linkages with your key suppliers. ■

Michael Sherlock, former CEO of Brumby's Bakeries and co-author of the recently published *Jumpshift*, has suggestions for bakers on delivering exceptional customer service in these tough economic times.



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