

ENCOURAGING ENTERPRISE FEEDBACK

Where it began

The Encouraging Enterprise programme had its roots in a change initiative I sponsored in the mid / late 1990s. At the time I was a Director of a mid-sized process plant contractor – Ventron Technology. We were surviving in tough times but coming under pressure both from larger competitors and smaller, often start up, companies at a time when our target marketplace was consolidating. This made it harder and harder to win business – we kept our heads above water but it was difficult.

We had always prided ourselves on our technical ability and the quality of our engineering staff – we had policies which made us different to many of our competitors. As the owner of a shiny new MBA, I had some ideas on how to move the business forward and set about making improvements on three fronts:

Rebranding the business

We made a virtue of our differences, highlighting the benefits for our customers choosing the tagline “*Different by Design*”. We stopped apologising for not being like our major competitors – we were the way we were because we’d decided to be like that, we were proud of our way of doing things and were convinced that it had real benefits for our customers.

The value of this change was as important inside the company as it was to our then current and target customers – it changed our way of thinking, made us more positive and improved our self-confidence.

Building on our differences

We had put a lot of effort into developing the technical skills of the team – we built training, learning and experience into our way of doing business but in my view, it didn’t go far enough. We needed to provide our customer facing staff with personal, interpersonal and business skills to transform them from engineers and project managers into ambassadors for the business. We needed to get everyone involved in sales and marketing and get them all to understand that their actions had a direct effect on our ability to win repeat business and get referrals and recommendations to win new business. Some people had some of the skills naturally but everyone needed some development.

Becoming customer focused

As a technically based business, we believed that if we did a great technical job, the customer would be satisfied – we were wrong and it took us a while to understand this. Customers placed as much, if not more, importance on how we did the job, how we treated them as they did on how it went.

We needed to learn what was important to customers, sometimes major things but often seemingly trivial issues and fix them. This meant changing processes and procedures; it meant being more flexible in our approaches and it meant that we needed to listen more [and act on what we heard!]. It was tough, particularly as it sometimes seemed to fly in the face of the then popular vogue for Quality Management Systems – it needed compromise it needed creativity and it needed perseverance but we got there in the end.

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The initiative was successful not only in the business results it delivered but also in the effect it had on our employees – look at what a couple of them had to say in personal endorsements on LinkedIn:

Business Development Director Ventron Technology Limited

"Working in the engineering services business, it is unusual to come across managers who give time to personal development and training. Jim was an exception. He work with all staff to develop personal skills in working together, working with customers and moving careers forward. He actively recruited graduates and developed them which is again unusual in our industry. The result was a well trained and motivated work force and organisation which thought customer service. I would have no hesitation in recommending Jim to any organisation" *March 9, 2011*

1st Jon Baker, *Senior Process Engineer, Ventron Technology Limited*
reported to Jim at Ventron Technology Limited

"Jim's vision for the training of engineering staff during my time at Ventron was instrumental in the success the company achieved in winning repeat business. Jim drove training for staff in interpersonal skills to ensure staff were able to better understand the client's needs/responses through such things as language and effective communication. I personally benefited greatly from Jim's approach to the balance of technical and management skills at levels within an organisation and I am happy to endorse him." *March 8, 2011*

1st Graham Shoel, *Process Group Manager, Ventron Technology Ltd*
reported to Jim at Ventron Technology Limited

Feedback from HG Systems on an early version of the programme:

How time flies. I'm sure that our current business ethos was founded on your original "Encouraging Enterprise" programme the date on my copy is the 3rd Feb 2003 (yes I still have it). We have a number of those who attended at that time still within the company.

... We are extremely busy having recently secured a number of substantial orders, with more to come (hopefully).

... The group is significantly larger than seven years ago.

Graham Stevens HG Systems November 2010.

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Feedback from Mark Burbridge [formerly] of O'Hare Engineering [Endorsement on LinkedIn]

Partner
FMEA

"Jim has a real passion for the business models he works with which was transferred to us as a senior team. We had to think very carefully about what we were trying to achieve as a team and how we would market ourselves going forwards. In addition, working with Jim one-to-one is a real pleasure. He has great depth of knowledge and experience and is very happy to work closely with clients in sharing this." *November 23, 2010*

Top qualities: Great Results, Personable, High Integrity

1st Mark Burbridge,
hired Jim as a Business Consultant in 2003

The work for O'Hare's was related to the content of Encouraging Enterprise and comprised:

1. Review of the attributes and work practices of the client's then business development / customer relationship team.
2. Develop a competence model for future team members
3. Identify the attributes required for selection [Recruitment and Development]
4. Design a development programme for candidates

In parallel with this work Fulcrum undertook an independent review of the literature on this subject and researched the views of senior personnel in related businesses. A report on this topic [Professional Services - Developing Relationships] is available on the resources page of the Fulcrum website. <http://www.fulcrum-management.co.uk/resources.htm>