How to Recruit your Team

A guide to help you focus on how you recruit and then lead your people so that you can get the best from them

In a company of any size, but especially a small one, employees make a vital contribution to achieving the business goals, and in delivering the level of quality necessary to attract and retain customers. As such, you must focus heavily on how you recruit and then lead your people so that you can get the best from them. In the modern workplace, 'being the boss' does not automatically mean that people will respect you, or indeed go the extra mile for you, so issues like finding the right people, engaging them and adopting a flexible leadership style are important considerations.

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To assist you with maximising the contribution of your people, this guide addresses the following content:

The information here is designed to provide you with a general overview of the key issues under these headings and further details and additional tools and resources can be found on the Business Tools web page.

1. Recruitment and Retention

When focusing on the recruitment and retention of employees for your business, there are some general considerations you should always keep in mind:

- The first point to recognise about recruitment and retention is that it is a process with a number of key stages, all of which combine to enhance your chances of finding the best candidates available for any advertised position.
- It is also worth pointing out that in terms of leading and managing employees if you are not recruiting the best people available, then it is always going to be an uphill struggle to manage them day-to-day.
- Another general rule is that when seeking to fill any vacancy you should always consider the internal candidates that could be promoted to the available post and then recruit externally for the more junior position.
- Too often owners/senior managers pay too little attention to the recruitment process and only become actively involved when a senior post is being filled, or at the end of the process for a quick ‘final’ interview. This is a mistake and you should be concerned with the quality and suitability of every employee who joins your business.
- It is often assumed that interviewing is something that any experienced manager can do. Again, this is a mistake: yes, anybody can conduct an interview, but few can do it well unless they are appropriately trained. Nobody in your business should conduct interviews without adequate training.
- There are many legal issues associated with the recruitment process and you should familiarise yourself with all relevant legislation.

The principle objective of the recruitment process should be to recruit, select and appoint employees appropriate to the present and future needs of your business. Each element of the recruitment and selection process has a contribution to make in helping to achieve that objective and, as a process; you should view recruitment and retention as entailing the following eight stages:

A summary of requirements at each stage is provided in the following sections.

Stage 1 - Job Vacancy

Naturally, the first step in the process is when a vacancy arises in your business. However, before rushing to fill a position, consider the following points:

Do you know why the vacancy has arisen? Perhaps the previous employee left due to problems in the business and unless these are resolved, the new candidate will likely be unhappy too.

In a small business, every cent counts so when a vacancy arises it is useful to consider whether you could manage effectively (not just scrape by) without that post being filled, or whether through job redesign, or part-time work, savings could be generated.

As mentioned above, is there potential to appoint/promote an internal candidate to the vacant position and then recruit externally for the lower post? By promoting from within, where possible, you reduce the risks associated with recruitment but you also let your existing employees see that there is a potential 'career path' in your company which might encourage them to stay longer with you.

Once you have considered the above points, you can then reflect upon the second stage.

Stage 2 - Job Analysis

Employee recruitment is potentially a very subjective process and unless you take active steps to reduce the levels of subjectivity, you will find that, more times than not, you will make poor recruitment decisions based solely on gut feeling; and as a result you will be frequently caught out by people who 'do good interviews'. Worse still, without objective criteria to evaluate candidates your propensity to subconsciously select employees who 'fit' with your world view will increase, so ultimately you will end up with a lot of like-minded people in the business.

This might sound like a good thing, but it certainly is not as a healthy diversity is far better in terms of business effectiveness. To begin the process of reducing subjectivity, job analysis seeks to answer two questions:

2.1 What do you want employees to do?

Knowing what it is you want your employees to do is a fairly basic requirement and most businesses now have defined job descriptions in place for every position. If you don't have them, you should address this weakness immediately; don't assume that your employees are on the same wavelength as you when it comes to what their job involves and what results are expected. If you already have them, make sure they remain current and reflective of what is required and adjust them where necessary.

When using job descriptions as part of recruitment, keep the following points in mind:

The earlier that you give them to potential candidates during the process the better, because before you interview them, you want to at least be sure that they know what the job will entail and are comfortable with that.

Use the job descriptions to screen applicants based on what you want the employee to do versus what each candidate can do based on their CV.

You may also develop specific technical or job-specific questions to ask during the interview based on the job description.

Apart from their use in recruitment, job descriptions also play an important role in managing employee performance because how can you ever measure an employee's contribution, if you haven't clearly outlined to them what they are supposed to do? They can also be used in training and development to help identify individual training needs, so they are vital tools.

However, job descriptions only describe what you want a person to do; as part of recruitment, you also need to know what type of person you want for any given job.

2. 2 What type of employees are you seeking?

As mentioned, you can generally find out what a candidate can do by analysing their CV or by looking at the past jobs they have held. When you

> “ competence ”

compare that to the job description you can get a fair idea as to whether they are right, in a competence sense, for a particular job in your business. But when you seek to fill a vacant position, do you also have a defined picture in mind of what type of person you want, or is it a bit vague?

Unfortunately for a lot of small business owners, it's the latter and they only have a general idea of what they are looking for. Consequently, their approach to interviewing goes somewhat like this: the first person who comes for interview on the day sets the benchmark.

The second is either better or worse than the first and so on down the line. The problem with this approach is that each candidate is compared against the previous one, so you can be easily swayed by those who put on a good show at interview.

You avoid this trap by devising a profile of the 'ideal candidate' which serves as the basis for how you select from the pool of interviewees available. You may not find the ideal but you measure all candidates against that profile and select the individual who most closely matches it. An employee profile (often called an employee specification) essentially identifies the characteristics of the person you want to fill a particular position. You do not need a different profile for every position as you do with Job Descriptions, but you can have one for key types of jobs – customer facing and non-customer facing. So it's not a major task.

Although it depends on the job you are recruiting for, in developing a profile of the ideal candidate, you could consider headings such as:

▪ **What *education or training qualifications* do you expect the ideal candidate to have to be able to do the job?** ▪ **What level of *work experience* are you looking for?**	▪ **What specific *skills and knowledge* must they already have to do the job to the standard you require?** ▪ **What *communication skills* do they require?**	▪ **What overall *personality/disposition* are you looking for in the person?** ▪ **What *personal attributes* must they have? *Define them very clearly***

It is only through answering these questions and then clearly mapping out what you are looking for that you will enhance your prospects of recruiting someone who is more likely to engage with your business. After all, an interview is supposed to help you determine if a candidate is the 'right' person for the job, but you can never do so unless you clarify what 'right' actually means. Another similar approach to drawing up an employee profile is to use the seven headings below:

- **Education Qualifications/Training** - Are there any specific educational or training requirements?
- **Work experience** - Does the candidate need to have any particular level of previous work experience?
- **Skills and Knowledge** - Are there any particular skills and/or knowledge which are required for the job?
- **Physical Attributes** - Does the work involve strenuous lifting etc.?
- **Personality/Disposition** - What type of personality might be most appropriate for this position? Will they be required to work as part of a team?
- **Communication Skills** - Does the position require the candidate to communicate with the public?
- **Personal Circumstances** - Are there unsocial working hours? Does the position involve travel?

We do not live in a perfect world so it is unlikely you will find a candidate that fits the required profile perfectly. So, to help assess each candidate these headings can be examined under *essential or desirable* characteristics. Finally, it is vital that your employee profiles/specifications do not contain any requirements that ignore or contravene relevant employment legislation.

By having employee profiles in place, you can then devise a series of interview questions to draw out whether the candidate matches the profile and use them as part of your interview plan. As an example, let's say you were looking for someone who is a team player. Of course you wouldn't devise a question such as, are you a team player? That's not going to tell you anything. Instead you might devise questions along the lines of:

Give me some examples of where you felt you made a positive contribution to your team in the past?
What do you think your previous team mates would say about working with you?
What can you bring to our team that would set you apart from other candidates?

Developing and using well-structured questions, based on the employee profile, will help you to get behind the mask that many people wear at interviews so that you get a better insight into a candidate's true personality.

Stage 3 - Attracting Candidates

The purpose of analysing the vacancy is to have a clear picture in mind of the job requirements and the type of person you wish to recruit. Then you must set about trying to attract suitable applicants for this position.

Not only do you want to attract a good number of candidates for interview, but perhaps more importantly you wish to attract the right quality of candidates. In other words it is the quality of applicants and not the quantity that you attract which is most important.

In seeking to attract applicants it is important to consider two sources:

Internal Recruitment

As mentioned, it is important to think about whether the position can be filled internally before looking externally. This is particularly relevant for supervisory or management positions. Internal recruitment has the following advantages:

Reduces recruitment costs.

Internal candidates are already familiar with your organisation, its aims, objectives etc.

Can act as a motivating factor for others in the business by showing them that it is possible to move 'up the ranks'.

A candidate from outside the company will always be an 'unknown quantity' no matter how effective your selection process. On the other hand a person promoted from within is already known to you.

However, it will not always be an option to recruit or promote from within. The important message is not to overlook a potential applicant already working for you as it can have a detrimental effect on their morale and their commitment to you business.

> *"there are many sources of external recruitment to use"*

External recruitment

There are many sources of external recruitment including:

Websites.

National/local newspapers/trade journals.

Recruitment agencies/consultants.

The source(s) of recruitment you use will be dependent upon a number of factors such as:

The type of position you are seeking to fill.

The amount of money you wish to spend on filling the position.

What has worked well in the past.

Advertising

As advertising is an expensive source of generating interest in available positions, it is important that the content of the advertisement achieves the following objectives:

To reach the desired target audience.

To attract the required number of suitable candidates.

To send out the right image about your company.

The **AIDA** principle can guide you here, and your advertisements should:

Gain the **A**ttention of the right people.

Create **I**nterest in the minds of those people.

Instil a **D**esire in them to apply for the position.

Provide them with information on how **A**pply for the position.

The content of the advertisements you place should include some or all of the following information, depending upon the nature of the position being advertised;

Brief promotional description of the company.

Job title.

Location.

Description of the post.

Qualifications and experience required.

Conditions of employment including salary.

Relocation expenses, if applicable.

Promotional prospects, if any.

Closing date.

The type of language used in your advertisement should always reflect the nature of the position you are seeking to fill.

Stage 4 - Screening Candidates

> *“narrow down the field”*

When you receive a large number of applications for an advertised position, the golden rule should be to interview less people for longer, so you need to screen the applications to select the most suitable candidates for interview. This can involve:

Using the job description and employee specification to compare against the CV.

Conducting short telephone interviews to gauge an individual’s suitability. This can often be a useful exercise as the candidates are frequently less ‘prepared’ so you get a better feel for their natural self; plus, if telephone techniques are important for the advertised position, then you can also assess their telephone manner.

The purpose of the screening process is to narrow down the field so that you can spend more time with each candidate for formal interview. It is important to note here too that you cannot contact a candidate’s previous employer at this point for references without their explicit permission.

Stage 5 - Interviewing Candidates

The old saying of '*failing to prepare is preparing to fail*' is particularly true in relation to interviewing. If you are going to have any real chance of finding the most suitable candidate then both you and the candidate must be adequately prepared for the interview.

Preparing the Candidate

To help the candidate to be fully prepared for the interview you should:

- ☑ Ensure that adequate notice is given of the date and time for the interview.
- ☑ Ensure that the candidate is aware how to get to your premises.
- ☑ Ensure they are clear where to go and who to contact upon arrival.
- ☑ Ensure they are aware of any information, documents etc., you would like them to bring with them to the interview.

> “*be prepared for the interview*”

Preparation by the Interviewer

To ensure that you are fully prepared you must:

- ☑ Review all the relevant information beforehand - job descriptions, employee profiles, application forms etc. You should examine each CV or application form to identify areas to question during the interview.
- ☑ Prepare a plan of how you intend to conduct each interview - consistency is important. This should include an outline of similar questions to ask all candidates based on the job description, employee profile and CVs, so that you can compare like with like.
- ☑ Prepare a suitable venue for the interviews. The choice of location and the layout of the room will have an impact on the outcome.
- ☑ Make sure you are free from disruptions when you are interviewing and do not schedule too many interviews on the same day.
- ☑ Allow adequate intervals between each interview, giving yourself some time after each one to finalise your notes.
- ☑ Provide a list of candidates and their interview times to your receptionist. This will help to present a professional image to candidates on arrival.
- ☑ If two or more of you are conducting the interviews this obviously increases the preparation required so that each knows what role they will play during the interview.

Conducting an Interview

There is a well-known and easy to apply structure for conducting interviews known as the WASP approach. It enables you to offer a similar format to each candidate, thereby ensuring consistency in the interviewing process and assisting your evaluation at the end.

Welcome

During this initial phase of the interview you should:

Establish Rapport - Break the Ice. A relaxed candidate will perform better.
Explain the purpose of the interview.
Outline the format for the interview with approximate timings.
Inform the candidate that you will be taking notes.

Acquire Information

In this phase of the interview you are seeking to gather as many relevant details from the candidate as possible so that you can make an informed decision about their suitability.

Begin with general questions before moving to the more specific.
Use your question technique to explore background, attitudes, suitability etc., relevant to the employee profile and job description.
Probe to explore any ‘gaps’- but do not interrogate them.
Let the candidate speak, use your listening skills!!! They should speak for 80% of the time.
Remember as you assess the candidate they are also assessing you and making some judgements about you and the company.

Supply Information

Once you have obtained all the relevant information you need, then you should allow the candidate to ask you questions about the position. You should ensure that you:

Outline the job description in greater detail giving an overview of their potential role in the company.
Provide the candidate with details on the salary and conditions associated with the position.
Answer any remaining interviewee questions.

Plan and Part

The final part of the interview is designed to ensure that both parties leave the interview fully aware of the next steps in the selection process. You should:

Ask to check references – you do need permission to do so.
Discuss salary if not mentioned already
Give timetable for your decision and how they will be notified
Thank them
In some cases you may wish to provide the candidate with a tour of your facilities. This can be done at this stage but inform them at the outset.

Question Technique

Question technique is a vital skill for the interviewer. You will use questions in an interview to:

Relax the candidate.
Encourage them to open up.
Probe their background.
Identify candidate's strengths/weaknesses.
Gauge their overall suitability.

Questions should be:

Open (in most cases).
Clear.
Relevant.
Well worded - What, Why etc.
Not leading.
Asked throughout the interview.

The types of questions that are used in an interview can be classified as follows:

Open Questions

Designed to get the candidate to open up and express themselves. They will generally begin with the words "Tell me" or "Who" "What" "Why" "When" "Where" "How".

Probing Questions

These questions are designed to delve more deeply into something the candidate has done or said. For example the candidate might have included a training course that they had attended on their CV. You might want to find out more about the course or how it helped them at work. To do this you might say, "I see from your CV that you did a course in Health and Safety. What did you cover on the course and how did it help you in your last job...? How could it help you in this position...?"

In an interview situation, you should never take a statement made by the candidate for granted. Always probe to find out more, particularly if you feel it is relevant to the job. For example a candidate may tell you that they are very good at working on their own initiative. You could just accept this statement. However it is better to explore what they have said by asking them something like "You mentioned earlier that you were good at working on your own initiative. Tell me about some situations where you used your own initiative in the past...?"

It is important to note that probing and interrogating are not the same thing!!! It's good to probe.

Comparison Questions

These questions are designed to get participants to compare past experiences. They are designed to see if the candidate gives some thought to the work that they do and how this job fits in with their thinking. For example you might ask a candidate about two past jobs they held - "What was the hardest thing you found about moving from Job A to Job B...?" This could then be followed up with "How would that experience of changing positions help you if you were successful in getting a job with us...?"

Behavioural Questions

These questions are designed to examine how a candidate reacts in a certain situation, or to explore their character in greater detail. They might take the form of "What do you think you contribute to a team...?" or "What would you do if you were faced with an angry client...?"

The purpose of the questions you ask is to find out as much relevant information as possible about the candidate. As mentioned, ideally the candidate should do most of the talking during the interview (80%). Using well worded questions will help you achieve that.

Questions should not be:

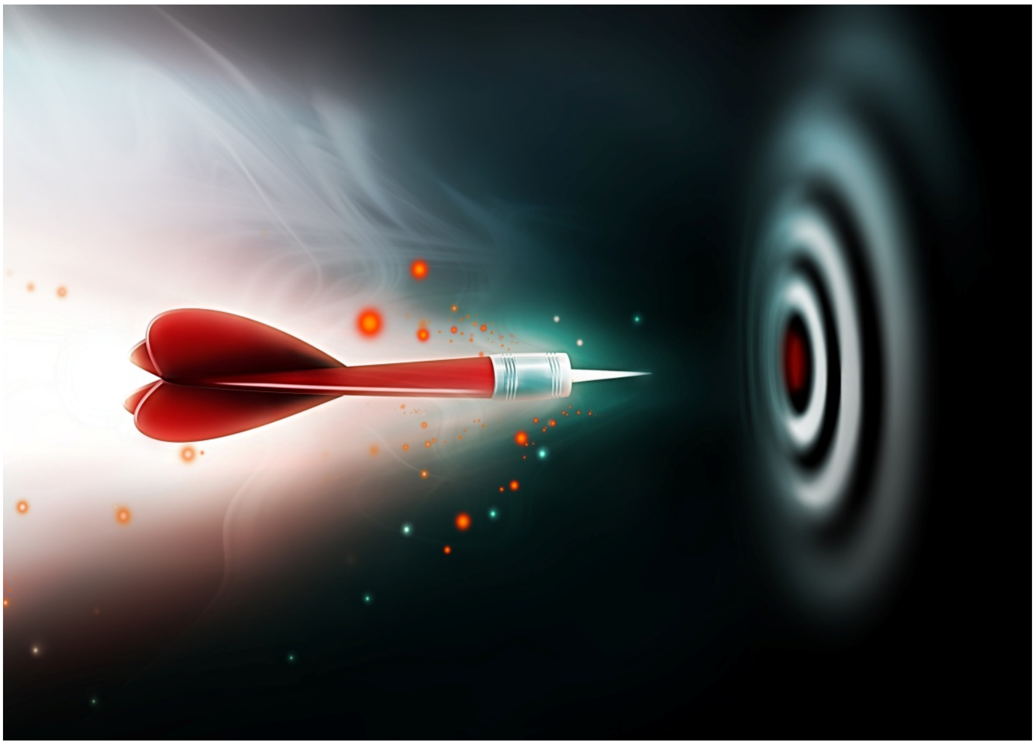
‘Quick-fire’ interrogation type questions.
Critical or disparaging.
Long winded
Of an overly personal nature.
Closed questions, for example: “Can you tell me...?” There may be some occasions where you want a Yes/No answer but most of your questions should be open.

It is also very important that you fully understand what questions you can and cannot ask during an interview and the legislation surrounding this area.

Listening Skills

Listening is a skill designed to encourage the candidate to speak up more and to prevent you from doing all the talking. We often assume that as we have two ears and don’t have any hearing defects then listening is not a problem for us. But most of us are poor listeners, and need to develop our skills. It is very easy to be distracted by noise or movement and our attention spans can be quite short. Sometimes when we like someone we listen intently to what they say, whilst with others we mentally switch off. In an interview situation not listening can put the candidate off. In other words we need to actively listen and this can be done by using the following simple techniques:

Eye contact – shows you are listening and encourages the candidate.
Nodding – gives encouragement.
‘Mirroring’ – matching your body posture with that of the candidate subconsciously relaxes them.
Encouraging - ‘Yes, go on’ or ‘Mm, yes’ is another form of prompting them to continue.
Paraphrasing - ‘So, what you are saying is...’ shows you have the gist of what they said.
Summarising – may be useful when you want to be very clear what they said.
Minimal Note-taking – taking too many notes means you break eye contact and can be off-putting for the candidate in anv case.



Common Reasons for Interviews Failing

Finally in this section, it is useful to consider the common causes of failed interviews:

Lack of preparation

If either party is unprepared then the interview is unlikely to be successful. If the interviewer is unprepared, then he or she cannot provide an environment that will enable the candidate to portray themselves in the best light.

Judgement made too early

Too often the interviewer makes up his or her mind too early (often in the first few minutes). This is totally subjective and does not allow the candidate a fair chance.

Unstructured interviews

If the interviewer has no set format to follow, then each interview will be conducted differently. This does not allow for a common assessment of candidates to take place. When this does happen the interviewer usually makes their judgement solely on what they liked or disliked about their candidate. In such circumstances, when asked why they rejected a candidate they often give vague reasons such as, “there was something about them I didn’t like’.

> “*improve your interviewing skills*”

Interview environment

If the interview is conducted in a location that is uncomfortable for one or both parties then this will affect the outcome of the interview.

Too many interviews

If too many candidates are interviewed on the same day, then those arriving later in the afternoon will have to work harder to create a good impression. As interviewers become tired they are harder to impress.

Poor interviewing skills

Many interviewers do not work to improve their skills. They make some or all of the mistakes identified above. In addition to these, other common problems are that they often:

Ask badly worded questions which don’t allow the candidate to open up.
Do too much talking during the interview.
Become confrontational with candidates.
Allow prejudices to influence their decisions.

Keep these points in mind as you plan future interviews.

Stage 6 - Selecting and Appointing Candidates

It has already been established that interviews are a very subjective method of evaluating the suitability of a candidate and some guidance has been provided above on how you might reduce the subjective nature of your interviews. There are of course many other recruitment methods that can be used in conjunction with interviews to reduce subjectivity, such as psychometric testing or assessment centres but for many tourism businesses, interviews remain the primary tool used.

Whatever selection method you use, at the end of the process, you must still make the decision as to who you feel is the most suitable candidate. The decision on the person or persons to be appointed should be made after all the interviews have taken place.

If you interview a candidate early in the process who you feel is suitable for the job, then the danger is that you have already made up our mind; subsequent candidates are then measured in comparison to them. This does not give everyone an equal opportunity. Maintaining objectivity is not easy - you are only human after all and you have to work extremely hard at it.

To maximise the potential for selecting the best candidate the following steps are worth noting:

As stated, prepare a job description and employee profile at the outset of the recruitment process. These are then the criteria against which you will measure each candidate.

Prepare a simple assessment form incorporating these criteria. This can be based on a numerical or descriptive scale and could follow the format below:

Candidate Name :	**Date:**

	Poor				**Excellent**	
Criteria	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Comments**
(Perhaps list criteria from your Employee Profile here or devise summary evaluation criteria)						
Total Score						

Salary Expectations	€	**Notice period required in current Job**		**Candidate has own car?** (If relevant for post)	Y/N	**Full Clean Licence?**	Y/N

References
Candidate reference checks are positive - Y/N Describe:

Decision			
Appoint	2nd Interview	Decline	Other

During each interview take only brief notes on candidate responses.

After each interview complete the assessment form for the candidate in question while the details are fresh in your mind.

When you have completed all the interviews compare the assessment forms to identify the most suitable candidate.

For more senior positions it is important to conduct a second interview, with more than one interviewer seeing the candidate.

Appointing Candidates

Every company will have its own procedure for appointing successful candidates and clearly you will follow your own approach.

The procedure will generally entail these steps:

1. Candidate selected.
2. Verbal offer of appointment made.
3. Medical completed if appropriate.
4. Letter of appointment sent.
5. Contract signed.

This may vary slightly depending upon the urgency for filling the vacancy. Whatever procedure you follow it is important to remember that this is the beginning of your new employee's formal introduction to your company, so first impressions last.

Stage 7 - Induction & Training

Every employee remembers their first few days in a job and if that experience is below standard, you may quickly find that you will have a disgruntled or at least a less than happy employee on your hands.

Induction is the process of receiving and welcoming employees when they first join your business and giving them the basic information they need to settle down quickly.

Induction has three aims:

To smooth the early stages when everything is likely to be strange and unfamiliar to the new employee.

To establish quickly a favourable attitude to the company in the mind of the new employee so that he or she is more likely to stay.

To obtain effective output from the new employee in the shortest possible time.

Usually the induction process has two components:

Company Induction

The first stage of induction is when the employee receives a detailed introduction to the company and their job. An employee handbook is useful for this purpose, but there should also be a face-to-face induction given which covers things like:

- ☑ A brief description of the company – its history, products, organisation and management.
- ☑ Basic conditions of employment – hours of work, holidays, pension scheme, insurance.
- ☑ Pay – pay scales, when paid and how, deductions, queries.
- ☑ Sickness – notification of absence, certificates, pay.
- ☑ Leave of absence.
- ☑ Company rules.
- ☑ Disciplinary procedure.
- ☑ Grievance procedure.
- ☑ Promotion procedure.
- ☑ Union and joint consultation arrangements (if relevant).
- ☑ Education and training.
- ☑ Health and safety arrangements.
- ☑ Medical and first-aid facilities.
- ☑ Restaurant and canteen facilities.
- ☑ Social and welfare arrangements.
- ☑ Telephone calls and correspondence.
- ☑ Travelling and subsistence expenses (if relevant).

If your business is not large enough to justify a printed handbook, the least that should be done is to prepare a typed summary of this information. You may not personally deliver the full induction but you should spend time with all new starters so that they understand your philosophy and what is expected of them.

Departmental Induction

When the initial briefing has been completed, new employees should be taken to their place of work and introduced to their manager or team leader for the departmental induction programme. This can involve working through a checklist of training and other information which might span their first month in the role.

> “ *training should be regular* ”

On-going Training & Development

Of course, training should not stop at induction and all employees should receive appropriate on- and off-the-job training on a regular basis which balances the needs of the business and the individual.

Stage 8 - Employee Evaluation

Monitoring employee performance is of course an on-going activity, but for new employees, evaluation should have the following defined phases:

End of first day/week – a quick 'how are you getting on' chat should take place at the end of the first day, and week, to ensure they are settling in well.

End of first month – a more detailed job chat should take place where the employee's early performance is reviewed in detail and positives highlighted. Where difficulties are identified, the employee should be made aware of any issues, offered remedial coaching and support, and then this should be followed up again at weekly intervals. It is important that problems are addressed early so that before an employee's probation period (usually 3-6 months) has elapsed you are confident that they are the right person for the longer term.

End of probation period – given that you will have addressed any problems by this point, this stage should represent the employee's first formal appraisal at the company where his or her strengths are identified and praised and future goals are established. You may at this point revise their pay upwards if that was part of the employment contract. By reviewing the new employee's early performance in a staged fashion, you ensure that they are delivering for the business in the manner expected but you also show them that you are interested in them as individuals and eager to help them grow and develop.

The evaluation process can of course also tell you whether your recruitment process is working effectively. By viewing 'recruitment' as an eight stage process, you attach greater importance to it and by taking the necessary action within each of those stages you ensure that you are maximising the quality of employees you bring into the business.

The following section highlights some important considerations about leadership, employee engagement and disciplinary/grievance procedures.

2. Training and Development

The issue of training and development is often under-considered by small business owners and managers because they mistakenly believe that with so few staff the issue is less pressing for them than it might be in larger firms. This is a dangerous misperception and it can be argued that in a small business you need every employee to operate as effectively as possible and training and development is an important contributor to that aim. In any case, regardless of the size of your business, there are statutory requirements in areas such as health and safety, fire, hygiene etc., which mean you must provide training to your employees.

Training and Development, when consistently offered, based on defined needs and well-managed and delivered can produce the following results for your business. It can:

Improve individual and team performance which will result in improved productivity, quality, efficiency, and ultimately better business results.

Help to attract and retain higher quality employees when they see the potential to develop their skills and knowledge with you.

Contribute to the delivery of excellent service for your customers.

Provide for greater flexibility in terms of work allocation when your employees are trained in various elements of the business (multi-skilling).

Lower costs through reduced wastage and other inefficiencies which result from having unskilled employees.

These are just some examples of the benefits that can arise, but these can only happen when you adopt a structured approach to training in your business.

In essence, there are two types of training you could consider:

On-the-job training: this relates to the skills and knowledge that are required to enable an employee to complete the various tasks associated with their role to the highest standard. This can be a formal skills training session whereby you introduce an entirely new task to an employee in a structured way, or can occur through coaching whereby you ‘coach’ an employee to improve their performance in a particular task or aspect of it.

Off-the-job training: this primarily relates to the knowledge an employee needs in order for them to improve their performance at work and depending upon their level can include training such a health & safety, hygiene, customer care, management development etc. This type of training is frequently delivered away from their work in group sessions with other employees who have similar needs.

Regardless of the type of training involved, when seeking to optimise the benefits derived from training in your business, it is helpful to explore some key factors across three dimensions: the *context*, *content* and *contribution* of training.

2.1 The Context for Training

Training cannot be viewed in isolation and broader issues such as the overall culture within your business and general attitudes towards training have a vital role to play in terms of optimising benefits. Culture is a fairly intangible concept in any business but it impacts heavily on day-to-day life. In relation to the benefits derived from training, the culture within your business will directly influence their likely scale and scope. Without a wider 'developmental' culture, where your employees (be that one or ten) feel valued and respected, any expenditure you make on training will have limited impact; a degree in psychology is not required to understand just how irrelevant training becomes for employees who are badly managed on a daily basis, or when they feel undervalued.

"expenditure on training as an investment"

In addition, the general attitudes held about training can also play a major role in determining its effectiveness. You must view any expenditure on training as an investment and not a cost, with your decisions in this area taken on that basis.

When small business owners look at other aspects of running the business they usually do so from a return on investment perspective, but for some reason when it comes to training,

"a new dynamic"

something changes and many frequently consider it solely from the cost side. If you adopt an investment mindset in relation to training, it is surprising just how quickly a shift occurs away from the question, "what's this going to cost me?" to "what's this going to deliver for me?" and this in turn creates a whole new dynamic around the training function.

Equally, even if you are not directly involved in delivering training in your business, any operational managers and supervisors that you may have can frequently use the excuse that they "don't have time" to train their people. Again, with an investment mindset, they come to recognise that failing to train their people, amongst other things, makes them less efficient and ultimately less productive; as a result, management time is lost fixing the problems that arise from this fact. By front-loading the time in terms of training employees, the return is improved quality and productivity.

2.2 The Content of Training

The second dimension to examine when seeking to maximise training effectiveness in your business is to focus on the inputs side; or, specifically in this case, on what training is provided and indeed how that content is delivered.

It seems obvious that the content of training offered to your employees must be tailored to their needs, whilst at the same time remaining aligned to the needs of your business. But the reality is often quite different. For example, sending a relatively new employee and an employee who has been with you for some time on the same customer care course is of questionable value, for either the business or the employee. Yet this kind of thing happens all the time: employees are frequently lumped together and shunted-off to training programmes which may have little direct relevance to them.

For sure, generic training in areas such as customer care is applicable to all your employees, but even training of this type needs to be tailored to suit the varying levels of experience found in any business. There is no such thing as a 'one-size-fits-all' training programme in this day and age.

> *"stimulating and engaging"*

Particularly in relation to personal development - be that at employee or managerial levels - there must be a direct link between the findings of annual employee appraisals and training plans for the year ahead. Yet, here again, you often see a group of supervisors/managers being sent on a 'management course', the content, or indeed the level of which may be suitable for only a handful of those in attendance. A golden rule should apply here: any employee attending any training programme in your business must always clearly understand its objectives and how that particular course fits into their wider development plan. When they see its purpose, they naturally strive to learn as much as possible and are more likely to later apply that learning for the benefit of the business.

Linked to the content issue is the quality of delivery. The delivery of training has to be stimulating and engaging for employees so who runs any external programmes, or delivers on-the-job training, and how good they are at doing so, is a critical consideration – and this applies equally for internal trainers and any external consultants used. Badly delivered training is a waste of time. This again sounds like an obvious consideration but often isn't so in practice.

Focusing training on the needs of the individual is of course a challenge. It takes planning and organisation to better align training inputs to personal needs, but a failure to do so simply means that much of your expenditure on training is essentially money down the drain.

2.3 The Contribution of Training

A third dimension in seeking to optimise the benefits of training is the ability to measure the outcomes from any training provided; quantifying its impact not only allows for a cost-benefit analysis to be conducted on training previously delivered, but also helps to better target future expenditures. Unfortunately, there is still a fair degree of 'ad-hocery' going on when it comes to measuring training outcomes in concrete terms.

This perhaps goes some way to explaining why owners and managers are often so quick to slash the training budget when hard times hit; it's difficult to justify expenditure for an activity where the returns are too frequently described in 'fluffy' terms: making the case to your accountant that training leads to increased morale, improved quality, reduced turnover and so on is hardly a winning argument, true as those claims may be.

That said, there is no pretence that measuring the impact of training is easy. It is not. The key is to try to link the outcomes from all training activities to specific business measures. For example, if you offer customer care training for your employees, you naturally expect this to have an impact on the quality of service provided. The impact of that particular training could be measured by monitoring scores attained on future mystery guest assessments, or from tracking customer satisfaction levels.

This is just a snapshot example of how you can measure training impact, and developing a comprehensive approach takes time, but making training work for your business is as much about thinking as it is about doing: well thought out, but simple, systems can help you to identify training needs, plan training, deliver it and then measure its impact.

3. Leadership

There is much talk about leadership these days and the intention here is not to address the subject in a theoretical fashion but rather to focus on practical concerns. However, it is important to recognise that there is often confusion as to how ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ relate to one another so it is useful to begin by briefly clarifying that particular concern. Instead of thinking in terms like leadership or management, an easier way to look at this issue is to consider what you, or anybody holding a position of authority in your business, must do on a daily basis in order to be effective. Simply put, you must do two things:

Engage	**Engage *People* to ensure their commitment, competence and motivation**	**The ‘leading’ part**
Achieve	**Harness that engagement by focusing on *Process* to ensure productivity, efficiency and quality, in order to achieve the *Performance* and results required.**	**The ‘managing’ part**

To be successful, you therefore need to both lead *and* manage, for one without the other will lead to shortcomings of some kind.

For example, if you only ‘manage’, then you may not be too concerned with your people and whilst the work might be done, it will not be done to the highest standard possible because people will not feel valued or appreciated, which impacts on their performance. Equally, if you worry too much about the needs and feelings of your employees, you are in danger of trying to create a happiness camp at the expense of getting the job done.

The ideal approach is of course is to strive to get the balance right between the **engage-achieve** dynamic and whilst there is no set way of achieving this, a lot of it comes down to common sense, and having the right characteristics which help you to balance the equation.

3.1 Characteristics of effective leaders

The most effective managers/leaders stand out because:

They exude energy & enthusiasm

Some people are akin to energy vampires; they can suck the life out of you. Not so where effective leaders are concerned. They do the opposite and make you feel really energised and engaged simply by their upbeat and enthusiastic natures.

They have a 'knack' for communication

Good communication is the life blood of effective management, simple as that. The best leaders have a natural talent for communicating and they follow a simple but golden rule when they do so: the ABC rule, or Accuracy, Brevity and Clarity. Added to this, they have the right personal qualities, such as self-awareness, and the necessary delivery skills which make them really stand out as communicators.

They are always reaching higher

First off, the best leaders constantly set the bar higher in terms of their own performance. They never settle for second best and are self-motivated and goal-orientated individuals; they expect the same of others too. That said, they are fair in how they demand that extra effort from those around them. But demand it they do.

They visualise and communicate clear goals

Effective leaders are never 'headless chickens', nor are they spineless individuals who avoid difficult issues, sit on the fence or shift positions to suit whichever way the wind is blowing. No, the best managers have a clear idea of where they want the business to go – and those views are formed based on solid evidence, with a bit of intuition thrown in too for good measure. When that vision is clear, they flesh it out and modify it if necessary – with their senior people - until they feel certain it is the best way to go. Then they can win support throughout the business, or department, for that vision and later can translate those broad aspirations into meaningful goals, strategies and plans which serve to engage people and guide their actions.

They are smart and have good judgment

The best leaders are smart characters, not always 'booky' smart though, although at the same time they are never the village idiot either. Instead, they are individuals who benefit from having different forms of intelligence: the capacity to analyse and solve problems, knowledge related to the requirements of their job or an ability to be creative. As alluded to above they also always seem to have a fair helping of that critical, if somewhat intangible, commodity called common sense. They make decisions only when they have all the information at hand, and because they involve others in the decision-making process, they benefit from their wisdom and experience.

They are not afraid to step outside their comfort zone

The best bosses are those who are not afraid to try different things. New is good, as far as they are concerned, if it means potentially achieving better results. Now, when it comes to finding new ways forward, the best leaders do not necessarily think that they have all the winning ideas, or that only they can spot important trends and changes. No, what distinguishes them in this regard is that, first, they are open to change – they embrace it in fact – and, second, they create an environment where ideas and suggestions are welcomed from many sources so the flow of creativity is encouraged throughout the business.

They are inclusive not exclusive in their approach

A lot of managers talk about inclusivity these days, but the reality does not always match the words where some are concerned. Seeing as effective leaders are confident and open characters – with real empathy for others – they like to include people in the running of the business, where appropriate of course. And they are never afraid to loosen the reins or delegate to others, if they believe that will deliver the best results. For sure, like all human beings, they prefer some people over others, but they treat all fairly and never take dislikes to people for no reason, nor do they allow cliques to form amongst their employees. They really do think in terms of teams. Everyone has a chance to participate and contribute.

They make mistakes but learn from them

Of course, even the best leaders are not immune from making mistakes. Sometimes you see top leaders being portrayed as never putting a foot wrong. That's wishful thinking. Sure, the best leaders make fewer mistakes than others do, but that's largely due to the effective decision-making processes they follow in the first place; and when things do go awry, top leaders see those events as learning opportunities and move on. They don't make the same mistake twice.

They have, and follow, their moral compass

There have been many examples of business, and indeed other, leaders who have spectacularly fallen from grace in recent times and yes, they all fell for different reasons, but a big factor in all their downfalls was that they each lost their moral compass – or maybe they never had one in the first place. In some cases not having such a compass can lead to greed taking precedence over ethics, or in other words 'self' starts to matter most. Lots of things go wrong when you lose sight of your morals and it always leads to negative outcomes in the long run. The best leaders in any business, though, do have a moral compass and more importantly they follow it.

They have great self-control

This is perhaps the most important trait that all the best leaders possess. And it's vital because it helps them in so many aspects of leading and managing others. For starters, it allows them to think clearly, which helps in decision-making and that in turn results in fewer mistakes. It also helps them to act rationally not emotionally when faced with difficult people, so they can decide which leadership style is best to apply in any given situation.

This is not an exhaustive list but these 10 items are worth considering in terms of your own approach to leadership. In addition, it is also worth questioning how you lead on a daily basis. There is of course no one style but rather the key word is flexibility. On some occasions you do need to be firm with people, but you should never be aggressive as that is self-defeating; people usually focus on the aggression and not on the points you are trying to make. At other times, you should free up the reins so that your people have the freedom to make decisions without your involvement. This idea of a flexible leadership style it is hard to apply in practice each and every day but again, with the right characteristics, it becomes easier to adapt your leadership style to meet the needs of any given situation.

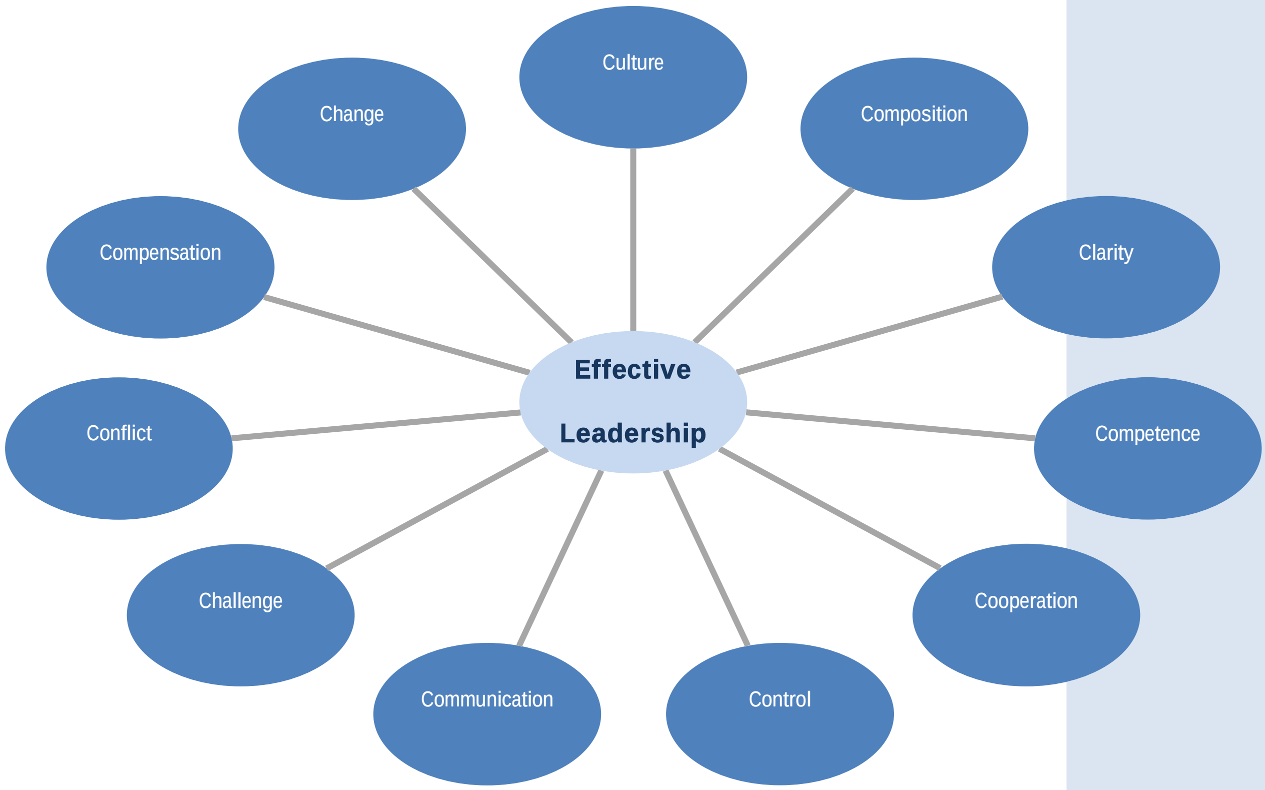
4. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement gets a lot of attention these days and whilst it is linked to motivation, it is a little bit more than that. In short, there are three types of positive employees that you find in most businesses:

- A satisfied employee is happy in their work, but they might not necessarily put in extra effort because of that.
- A motivated employee is not only happy, but does go that extra mile for you.
- An engaged employee, however, feels a real connection to your business, they believe in what you are trying to do and as a result they consistently give their best.

4.1 Drivers of Engagement

You will not be surprised to learn that truly engaged employees form the minority in any business. You will also not be surprised to hear that there is no magic pill for engaging employees, but from comparing best practices seen in companies where engagement is high, a list of twelve factors can be identified which all leaders need to be concerned with if they want to increase the levels of engagement over time:



It should be obvious that no one thing will, on its own, fully address the engagement issue but as a start point, when leadership is strong, engagement levels tend to be higher so effective leadership is certainly the most critical first step.

As well as your own capabilities, to really engage your people, you also need to consider the remaining drivers:

Culture – Culture is intangible for sure but it has a major impact on the feel or climate in any business. Whilst there is no ‘right’ culture, there are certain environments which build engagement, whereas others do the opposite and you play a vital role in building a culture which draws employees in rather than pushes them away.

Composition – relates to the make-up of teams and, as mentioned earlier in this guide, you need to pay very close attention to how you recruit people into existing teams. All employees do not necessarily have to like each other, nor will they, but there must be a general ‘fit’ between all members; otherwise it is hard to engage them because who wants to work alongside a bunch of people with whom you have little or nothing in common?

Clarity – in this context means ensuring that all your employees understand both aspirations and expectations. Aspirations relate to the big picture and, as a basic building block of engagement, you need to help your employees to fully understand where the business is going and how they can contribute to that. Clarity is also required as to what you expect of your employees, as nothing will destroy engagement faster than conflicting directions or shifting roles and responsibilities.

Competence – contributes to engagement in a number of ways. First, most employees want to build their skills and talents at work so to increase engagement you need to ensure that there are relevant and regular opportunities for personal development. Equally, all your employees at the same level should be similarly competent at what they are expected to do. If not, others in the team have to take up the slack and this creates resentment, or conflict, which can chip away at engagement.

Cooperation – levels of cooperation in teams are both a driver of engagement and a reflection of it. When people work well together they build bonds and trust increases and this in turn improves general engagement levels because most people prefer to work in collaborative environments.

Control – controlling how individuals behave within teams is critical to engagement because when certain of your employees are allowed to step out of line without consequence, this serves as a de-motivating factor for engaged employees as they question why they should bother. Equally, too controlling an environment stifles engagement because people sense a lack of freedom and autonomy.

Communication – is always key to the levels of engagement seen and where communication is regular, open, two-way and more importantly effective, employees tend to show higher engagement levels.

Challenge – for most employees having a sense of challenge in their work is vital to how engaged they feel with the business. When work feels repetitive or mundane, employees naturally feel less engaged so leaders need to find ways to introduce a sense of challenge for employees.

Conflict – the manner in which conflict is managed can have a major impact on how engaged employees are likely to be. Constructive conflict, which leads to new ideas and better solutions, should be encouraged, but well managed, so your employees feel that they can speak their minds or contribute in an appropriate manner. Destructive conflict, on the other hand, which adds no value should be dealt with promptly by you or relevant managers; a failure to do so will impact engagement levels as most people hate to work in a poisoned atmosphere.

Compensation – in the broadest sense is about people feeling rewarded for the contribution they make. Pay and conditions are of course an important element in this, but things like constructive feedback and positive recognition when deserved are just as powerful in terms of building engagement.

Change – how change is managed can also impact on the levels of engagement seen. Too little change can result in stagnation which destroys engagement, yet too much of it, or too much meaningless change, can simply frustrate employees and causes them to disengage.

Apart from raising your own game as a leader, you should also pay close attention to these factors because they will not only help to build engagement levels but more importantly having engaged employee is proven to lead to greater productivity and ultimately better results, which is ultimately what you want to achieve.

5. Disciplinary and Grievances

In any business, periodic problems with specific employees (disciplinary) will always arise, or indeed an employee may have a valid concern (grievance) which must be taken seriously. There are defined legal processes to be followed when addressing both disciplinary situations and grievances and you need to be fully familiar with them.

Some general guidance on each is described below.

5.1 Disciplining Employees

One of the core functions of any leader is to exercise supervision and control over employees; monitoring performance and maintaining discipline are vital concerns, using effective leadership approaches of course. Everyone has an off-day but repeated or persistent underperformance is different. Early intervention in such cases is always advisable and a general framework for resolving these matters is:

Recognition

You must first draw their attention to the problem and make it clear that you will no longer tolerate it. You draw a line in the sand, so to speak.

Acceptance

An important early step is to get the employee to accept that there is a problem and this can often be the most difficult part, for some individuals are either unaware of what they are doing, or more likely will attempt to deny it or blame it on someone else. But it makes it significantly more difficult to get someone to change an aspect of their behaviour if they don't first accept the problem in the first place. Having said that, don't waste an inordinate amount of time on this either; if they refuse to be accountable then you must make it clear that there is a problem and they need to resolve it.

Discussion

Some degree of discussion is always necessary because simply telling someone to change their behaviour doesn't usually work. You are prepared to be supportive here, to listen, to evaluate but you are not allowing yourself to be taken for a fool either.

Action

Based on what has been discussed, you will either agree what they need to change, or you may have to impose the route forward. Perhaps there may be action required on your behalf too, as valid issues may have arisen which are contributing to the problem and therefore require attention from you.

Review

You should always ensure that you review their performance at defined intervals to ensure that they are addressing the problem. If on the next occasion, they have failed to live up to their commitments, or abide by what you were forced to impose, then you do not rehash the whole problem again. You have given them a chance, the necessary support and they haven't responded. Unless you failed to deliver on something you had committed, then they have eventually sealed their own destiny and you now move to applying whatever disciplinary process is relevant in your organisation.

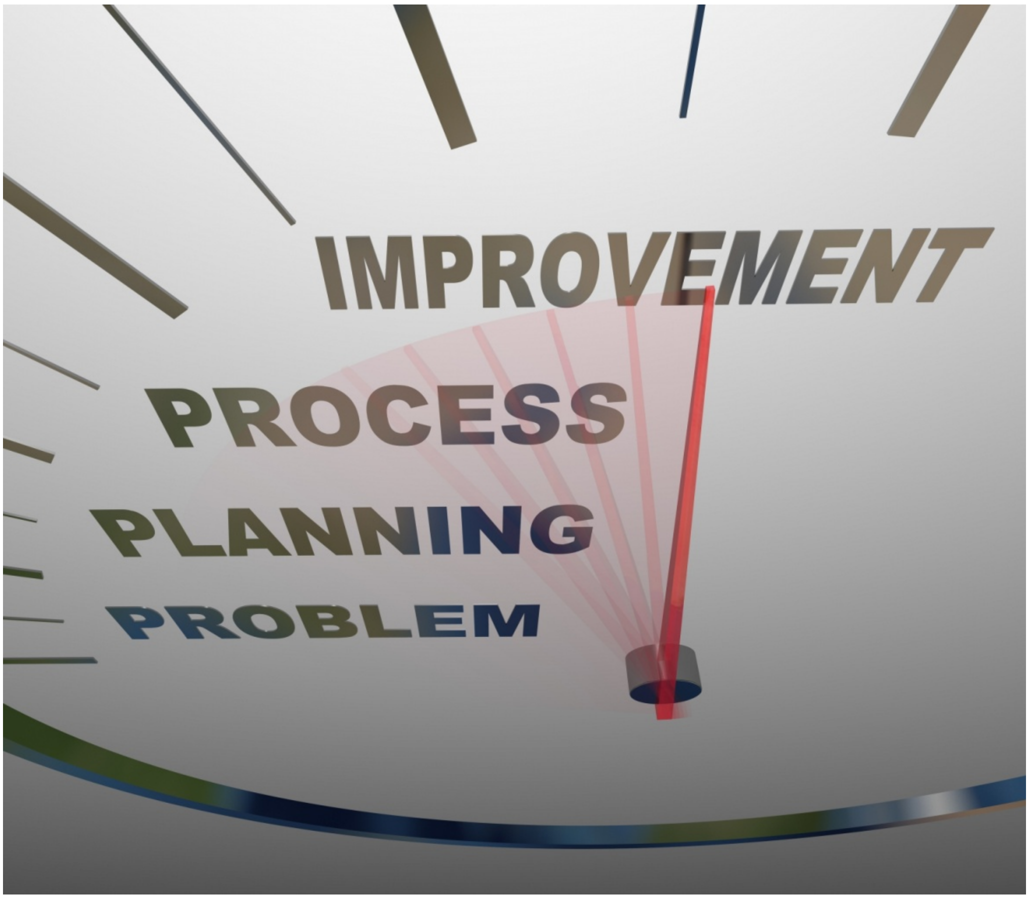
This is not a step by step framework of course but it should give you a general indication of how to better deal with any difficult employee. Essentially, you are starting with a coaching-type approach but if that doesn't work you shift to a disciplinary-based solution. When the focus shifts to the formal disciplinary process, the key steps may be:

A verbal warning.
A written warning.
A final written warning.
Suspension with/without pay.
Dismissal.

This is generally the standard procedure but there may well be other steps involved, such as transfer to another task, or section of the business, demotion, or some other appropriate disciplinary action short of dismissal.

"discipline"

Equally, an employee may be suspended on full pay pending the outcome of an investigation into an alleged breach of discipline. Where gross misconduct occurs it is possible to move directly to suspension with pay pending a hearing. This is a very complex area and these are intended as guidelines only; you should *always take professional advice before acting*.



5.2 Handling Grievances

Grievances may take many forms but are generally referred to as any feeling of dissatisfaction or injustice concerning any aspect of the work relationship. The majority of grievances are usually taken care of as a matter of course by managers during their normal working day. However it can occur that an employee feels that an unresolved problem is so serious that he/she seeks to have it settled under the formal procedure. A typical procedure is composed of a number of sequential steps as follows:

Stage 1 Grievances should be stated verbally or in writing to the employee's immediate supervisor who will attempt to resolve the issue immediately. If this is not possible the supervisor will come back to the employee within three working days.

Stage 2 In the event of a failure to reach agreement at Stage 1, the supervisor will prepare a written summary of the case. This will be signed by both parties and forwarded to the appropriate manager for investigation. The manager undertakes to give a response within five working days. The employee may request the presence of a staff representative if they so desire.

Stage 3 Where no agreement has been reached at any of the above stages, the employee may appeal to the senior manager/owner who will respond within seven working days.

Stage 4 If the issue remains unresolved after Stage 3, both parties may agree to use the services of a Rights Commissioner or the conciliation service of the Labour Court. If these services fail, the case may then be referred to the Labour Court for investigation.

Again, these are intended as guidelines only as to what the grievance procedure may entail and professional advice should be taken when such issues arise in your business.

6. Conclusion

The information provided in this guide is designed to help you find the right people in the first instance, to lead and manage them in a way that maximises their levels of engagement and to take appropriate action when disciplinary or grievance issues arise. Further guidance and additional tools are available on the Business Tools web page.

This guide has been provided to you as part of Fáilte Ireland's suite of guides and templates in the Business Tools resource.

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