



Enlightened Management gets results



When *Clive Hutchinson* bought Cougar Automation 8 years ago, the company was in trouble. Six months after he took over, they posted a substantial loss. Clive started addressing the issues step by step and once the financial situation was sorted he focused on customer service. From 2003 to 2009 turnover has increased by *168%* and profit by *245%*. When Cougar entered The UK customer experience award in 2004, 80% of the entrants were better than Cougar. A year later they *won* their category.

Improving customer service

What had happened in that year? No customer service initiative, no change management programme, no extensive customer service training, but many small concrete actions. The senior management team launched the focus on customer excellence at their Annual Company Day and overnight put up posters in the company, so when people walked in the next day something had visibly changed. Clive and his leadership team constantly talked about customer service and when making decisions asked *"Does this deliver customer excellence?"* All customer feedback is shared with all employees and so is financial information. Cougar organised internal training to help staff to understand and interpret customer survey data and financial information. *"When the assessors for the customer service excellence award came to visit Cougar, every one of the 56 employees was encouraged to talk to them freely and give any information they felt appropriate. The assessors were impressed with the access to information that staff had."* says Clive.

Enlightened people management

Parallel to the focus on customer excellence Clive introduced some radical people management concepts into the company. People are encouraged to play to their strengths using Marcus Buckingham's strengths inventory and strengths based recruitment. Cougar has no annual appraisal but a development review which involves no judging or measuring of past performance as that is covered throughout the year by customer feedback. The conversation invites the employee to identify what drags them down and actions to reduce this; what they enjoyed and how they can do more of that. It is the employee's responsibility to re-organise their work so that they play more to their strengths. These re-organisations happen mostly within the project teams. People have total flexibility when and where they work and decisions are made at the most appropriate level. Clive for example does not get

involved with customers as that is the role of Cougar's sales people and project managers while he sees his role as the *"guardian and architect of the philosophy and structure of Cougar"*.

Ensuring performance

In Clive's experience people's performance varies in the short term mainly due to external circumstances outside of their control but is consistent over a longer period of time. When things go wrong, people make mistakes or don't perform to the required standard, the question asked first at Cougar is *"Are they playing to their strengths?"* and help is offered to explore how they could operate differently, rearrange their work or find a partner to learn from. Employees can choose a sponsor that supports them in their development. People who have not performed have tended to leave of their own accord because they did not want to let their col-

"If people love what they do, they like coming to work and will give their best"



Case Study



Uta Langley, founder of 2 the point training, is an experienced trainer, facilitator and coach and has been working with groups for over 20 years. She has a record of success in initiating and carrying through a wide range of change management and management development projects involving all levels within an organisation. Uta has a background in international sales and marketing and has been working with a wide range of individuals and businesses from owner/managers of small businesses to senior executives in blue chip companies and public bodies.

Uta is also tutoring the Women into Enterprise course at the University of Bath.

leagues or customers down. Cougar does have a disciplinary process, but it isn't used often. Absenteeism or negative morale are not issues at Cougar. "If people love what they do, they like coming to work and will give their best" is Clive's experience.

Management and Leadership

Four out of the six senior leaders are elected at Cougar, an idea taken up after two members of staff saw a speaker from WL Gore. Team members can select the project team they want to work on, if there is requirement for their contribution.

Cougar's philosophy changed from "Sell-deliver-collect" to a vision of "10/10 for customer service; Happy cats (the name for cougar staff) and Zero waste" and can be communicated in one picture. New regional offices are opened when members of staff present a business plan to the board and show that they have researched the area and are prepared to take a personal risk by for example moving into the area. They then need to find people who want to work for them either internally or externally. Decisions in their office are up to them.

Does it work then this enlightened management?

Cougar has won customer service awards in 2005, 2007, 2009 and was among The Sunday Times best 100 SMEs to work for in 2009.

In employee surveys employees say that:

Colleagues go out of the way to help	(87%)
Managers share important information	(80%)
Employees feel happy with the balance of work and home life	(79%)
Staff are happy with pay and benefits	(73%)
Hutchinson runs Cougar Automation on sound moral principles	(80%)
Staff love their jobs	(80%)

From 2003 to 2009 turnover has increased by 168% and profit by 245%. Customers rating Cougar's work 7 and over have increased in that period from 37.5% to 95.7% and Customers rating Cougar's work 9 and over from 0% to 63%.

Could you do it in your company?

Cougar so far has been the only company I have encountered that has implemented some well researched but still radical principles on people management. "When I go to networking events, I am the alien" says Clive. We would love to support other businesses putting these principles into practice. If you run a company or division and can influence strategy and people management, if you are successful but your people could be happier, or if the recession has left your company in a weak position and you would like to implement some of these principles – give us a call.

Are you doing it already?

We are also interested to hear from other leaders who implement some of these principles in their business to organise a get together to share ideas and inspiration. Please get in touch with either Uta or Clive. [S](#)



For a FREE report on how to implement some of these principles, please e-mail uta.langley@2thepointtraining.co.uk and put Enlightened Management in the subject line.

Clive Hutchinson has been interviewed by Uta Langley from 2 the point training. Uta Langley, www.2thepointtraining.co.uk ; Clive Hutchinson, www.cougar-automation.com

