

Organization Success - Leadership Development and Management Development

Developing the Leadership and Management of Henshaws Society for Blind People for Stability and Future Growth

Henshaw's is a specialist provider of services to visually impaired people of all ages across the North of England. The services include education, residential care and support and community support. The organisation has employed over 400 staff and 200 volunteers. Immediately upon my appointment as Chief Executive, I was confronted with several very serious problems which were: (1) a remote and out of touch Board of Management, (2) a dysfunctional management team, (3) a lack of direction, (4) a wide range of services all doing their own thing, and, (5) a financially unstable organisation. I subsequently began a Revans Action Learning program, where, as leader of Henshaws, I researched and acted on all these problems as I was progressing through the program. As a result, the following improvements were made (and documented):

'The annual away days, which started in 2000 with the Board of Management and Senior Management Team, have greatly helped our relationship develop, and spending time together outside of formal meetings is so important in the process of building up mutual trust. From my personal perspective, I now feel that I have the authority to take control of the day to day issues, and I get the backing and support I need when I have difficult situations to handle.'

'All of the directors work extremely effectively, both individually and collectively. The creation of our new strategy really helped the team move to a new level. It is not just a meaningless document, which sits on peoples' shelves, it is used by all managers throughout the organisation as a reference point when they need to make changes or develop new ideas.'

'... our new strategy has very much given greater focus however, more micro-level changes to processes have also helped people have a clear idea of what is expected of them. Again, within the Investor in People report the assessor remarked that the planning ethos is good, and that managers understood their role not only in helping to construct plans but also in communicating objectives and delivering these. The Charity Commission (2003) were similarly impressed with our new strategy and the process we had used to arrive at our new vision ...'

'Since my appointment we have made some significant service changes, which have helped us become more focused. By working through our new strategy at all levels of the organisation, we have achieved clarity for the future such that the main focus for the next five years will be to build up what we regard as our centres of excellence in all our regions. This is already starting to have effect...'

'The Society's financial results for the twelve month period 31 March 1999 show an unrestricted operational surplus on ordinary activities of £321,000 [British sterling]. This improved performance is in part attributable to the results of the strategic review implemented in the latter part of last year'.

'The financial year ending 31 March 2000 has seen another excellent result for the Society with an overall operating surplus on ordinary activities of £366,000.'

'The financial year to 31 March 2001 has been another successful one for the Society both in terms of operational achievements and financial performance.'

'The financial year to 31 March 2002 has been another successful one for the Society both in terms of operational achievements and financial performance. Progress towards our strategic objectives continues and a new five year strategy for the period April 2003 onwards will be presented to the Board of Management for approval in September 2002.'

'The financial year ending 31 March 2003 has been a hugely successful one for the Society both in terms of operational achievement and financial performance. The final result for the year is a surplus of £771,000 on our ordinary activities.'

While my participation in the program delivered tangible improvements in the focus of the organisation, teamwork and the bottom line, I also improved my skills as a leader. The program helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses and more importantly improve my areas of weakness in a safe and supportive environment.

-Dianne Asher