

Challenges and opportunities for SMEs- PART 2

STAFF AND RECRUITMENT

A series of practical articles by Chris Elphick, Breadfruit Consulting.

During this series I am looking at a number of issues relevant to all SMEs and identify both the opportunities and challenges associated with each issue. Topics to be covered include planning; staff and recruitment; customers and service; marketing; competition; new products and services; being well organised; collaborating with others; understanding and analysing risk; managing the money; going into business with family or friends; grants, loans and investment; expansion and growth; technology and exporting.

Today my focus is on staff and recruitment.

Some sole traders are happy to remain working for themselves but many think about recruiting staff and building small teams.

The opportunities in growing your team are many:

- More heads are better than one. You can brainstorm ideas, share your thoughts and benefit from different approaches.
- Working with other people can be fun and is less isolating.
- Tasks can be shared, especially the more mundane or boring ones.
- You may be able to get some time off while others run the business!
- Having a small team could free you up to focus on other business activities like networking or planning that otherwise you might not have time for.
- You may be able to develop future staff or even the future owner or manager of your business.
- Having different staff can help attract different customers. Think about having gender, culture and age mixes.
- As a business owner you are actively contributing to the development of your local economy.
- Other staff will come with other skills and experiences.
- With every paid of hands you employ you get a free brain – use it!

So, with all these opportunities it is interesting that many SME owners find the challenges of employing other people to be really daunting and difficult.

Employing others is a great responsibility and should not be entered into lightly. Getting the right people will take time and can be frustrating. Recruiting people is a skill – if you are not sure of how to do it then look for help from your local Chamber of Commerce or business organisation. In a future article I will focus on the specific issues of employing family and friends which bring another set of opportunities and challenges!

If you employ people, there are some key things you must do, following recruitment:

Make sure they go through an effective induction process and are given a clear job description that they understand!

Develop a training plan with each staff member and invest in their development.

Help your staff set personal goals as well as work ones. These might include family goals.

Review progress regularly, celebrate achievements and help people learn from their mistakes.

Listen to your people and take a genuine interest in them and their ideas – we are all capable of thinking and we all have thoughts about our workplaces even if we don't always voice them.

Make the working environment interesting, safe and comfortable.

Take an interest in your people and their families – the more you care about them, the more they will care about your business and the more productive they will be.

Trust your staff – if you don't trust them then don't employ them!

If you are building a team try for diversity – people from different backgrounds, ages, gender, experiences, cultures all contribute to an interesting team experience.

Being a successful employer takes effort and sometimes the match will not work for the employer or the employee. It will take time but the rewards are many and significant. Your business could grow more quickly than if you are on your own; you will be providing an income for others; you might be offering opportunities to people in your community or family; if you employ young people you are helping to build the talent of the future.

If you need help with recruitment or employing people or you want some feedback on your own practices, then please get in touch. Happy teams in 2018!!

Chris Elphick is Partner in Breadfruit Consulting, supporting the development of a range of businesses and organisations in Melanesia and other parts of the Pacific. He is an experienced trainer, coach and business mentor and has years of experience of working with Small & Medium Enterprises. He and his partner Hazel Kirkham live in Vanuatu.

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