

1st March 2016

This Fool Can Cook

The hard knocks of separation and later divorce forced me to cook – till then, it was sold to me as a mystical art form, only accessible to those blessed with the rare touch. I wanted healthy – I was carrying a 360 grab handle. And after reading a series of cooking articles aptly named “Any Fool Can Cook”, I thought, they’re talking to me, I can do this. After all, I’ve been called pedantic, anal, stickler for procedures, and so forth, so how hard can it be to follow a recipe and prepare a healthy meal? It turns out – not hard at all. This fool can cook. And when you can cook you can be a chef, to innovate and create your own improved recipes.

Which brings me to what I consider is a massive failure of many businesses – the absence of simple and effective recipes, their business manual. A manual which outlines their recipe for success – the steps to make the ideal widget, to carry out the high quality service, to ensure each customer returns time and again. A recipe to employee proof, boss proof the process so the customer gets exactly what they ordered, every time, no matter who is at the company. Many organisations still rely quite heavily on their employees to make their own way through a typical day, developing their own procedures on the run in order to fulfil their roles. The end result is wasted time, frustration and a potentially negative impact on the business when the employee suddenly leaves. And, how can management be sure that the right standards, safety factors and certifications have been met? A business manual, followed and well-presented is a brilliant advertisement of an organisations professional approach – a major confidence boost to potential clients.

There are many steps towards a simple and effective business manual – I’ve identified five of them.

Understand the Plan: What is the strategic plan of the business and vision for the next 5 years? What is the best structure and roles to deliver this plan? How do each areas of business work together?

Get into the Detail: Review the way it’s done now. Continually ask why? Drill into the detail. Understand how all parts of the business link together. A skilled reviewer will ask probing questions without the confrontation.

Consult & Agree: Is this the best way to undertake this process, build this widget, and provide this service? Do other procedures need to change? Is the company structured correctly for optimal efficiency in carrying out its processes? Involve the people who have been doing it for some time but don’t leave it at that. Involve internal/external outsiders – the recipients of their service/product and others with knowledge or experience in another industry. It’s important to bring fresh thinking, a different perspective, an eye to simplify and innovate. Get agreement by all, especially those that need to utilise it on a daily basis. Their buy-in will make it work and allow the business to pursue continual improvement – a key goal of the business manual.

Document & Train: Get it down in written form, hard copy and electronic. Make it accessible and easy to follow. Have all the steps in sequential order and begin with a 1 or 2 worded title, capturing the essence of that step. And importantly, undertake awareness training – a process by which all employees are made aware of the company’s policies and procedures, the benefits, where to find them and the process by which they can initiate improvements.

Review & Improve: Many organisations have taken the initiative to develop a business manual but failed to keep it “alive”. The manual needs to be regularly reviewed, a process which prompts for improvements in policies, processes and procedures – a very important step in the application of an effective business manual.

Every professional, successful business which strives for growth and a sustainable future, needs a business manual. It needs to have simple and effective policies and procedures, which are consistently applied every day by every employee and continually reviewed and critiqued for improvement. It is the job of leaders, CEOs and senior management to take the lead and ensure this happens – without that leadership, the ship may float and go forward, but its course may be doomed.

