

**“A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO DO GREAT WORK”
- THE CHILDREN’S MUTUAL**

HR people often talk wistfully about having strategic influence and claiming a place at the board. Talk is one thing but there is no substitute for action.

“A place where people want to do great work” is a bold enough aspiration for any organisation: this was the vision that HR Director, David Bornor persuaded his board colleagues to set for themselves in late 2004. The Tunbridge Wells Equitable Friendly Society entered the new millennium in an unenviable position: too small to compete with the mainstream banks and too unspecialised to secure a niche for itself.

Then the government launched the Childrens’ Trust Fund and the people in Tunbridge Wells decided to grab the opportunity with both hands. Out went the old name and in came the friendly, new brand. The board took the opportunity to restructure the business, outsourcing a lot of back of-office functions and bringing the core team down to less than 80 people.

By mid 2005, Bornor had helped engineer a move from their drab old offices to a modern unit overlooking parkland. This was a fundamental signal of change: to a more relaxed and informal way of working. And out of the radical new business strategy came a people strategy that capitalised on the new, lean organisation – a One Team philosophy that turned into a major learning and development initiative.



David Bornor—Human Resource Director

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BOFS, WASPs and Boards

In these days of political correctness it is difficult to make a mild joke – even at the expense of oneself. So it was with some trepidation that we selected this theme for our latest dinner in November at One Aldwych. We understand that the term BOF was first applied to the blazered and boring old men who ran cricket in England in the '80s. So, it is very British; whereas 'white Anglo Saxon protestants' seems to have crossed the Atlantic sometime in the '70s. What we really wanted to debate was whether or not previous anti-discrimination laws had made much difference at board level, and also to speculate on the effect of the brand new age legislation.



Strangely, none of our dinner guests admitted to being BOFs: hardly surprising now that even 60-80 year olds are happily trekking the Himalayas, mountain biking across Europe, white water rafting or taking salsa lessons!

Nobody seemed concerned about the upper age limit for board members, but one banker pointed out that its customers do associate maturity with probity and that they have to be careful about appointing 'younger' directors.

For the majority of companies the *appearance* of the board is an irrelevance. Consumer companies pointed out that the real purpose of having a diverse board is that its members are more representative of their customer base. *Continued on back page*



The Children's Mutual™

"A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO DO GREAT WORK"

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Everything was in place to break down decades of cross-functional barriers and start lifting individual performance *and* creativity.

In addition to initiatives on reward, resourcing and communications, a unique approach was developed by Keary Harper and implemented in tandem with another consultancy, MJ Consultants. In essence, it was very simple: to get all 80 people working on their personal development and valuing the different talents and personalities every one of their colleagues brought to the business.

Everyone, including the executive directors took part in a tailor-made 360-degree feedback tool based on the new CM competences and reflecting where they wanted to take the new culture. Everyone discovered their personality preferences through the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. All this was delivered through a combination of small workshops and individual coaching through 2005 and reinforced again in mid 2006.

Some of the immediate benefits were straightforward:

- Increased self-awareness, sometimes above and beyond work.
- Development dialogues happening within the line structure.
- Increased awareness of, and respect for, other parts of the business.

Less obvious, but vital at a time of massive change was the feeling by individuals that, sometimes for the first time, the business was making a significant investment in them as individuals.

That was 2005 – how about now?

- The overall business results are excellent

- The relationship between the core team and the outsourced part of the organisation is working well, despite teething problems

- Some individuals have really grabbed the opportunity to develop themselves and visibly increased their potential.

- Myers Briggs Types have entered the working language and are about to be posted on the intranet for the whole team.

- The board has a new chairman and two radically different new non executive directors

There is still more to do and further external coaching will be used selectively, based on real demand and proper justification. The Board is re-examining its own governance and effectiveness as decision-making body.

For David Bornor this has been living proof that HR has to earn its place at the table - and that it is better to take a risk and go for bold targets than try to change incrementally. For Keary Harper it has been a good example of creatively shaping our coaching expertise to meet a client need – combining the best of team and individual coaching in a unique and successful way.

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Children's Mutual—Tunbridge Wells

THE FIRST 100 DAYS (REVISITED)

It takes the Americans to grab a simple idea and re-brand it so that it sounds new, exciting and sufficiently arcane to be intriguing. The latest one to hit these shores is called 'onboarding', and you could be forgiven for confusing it with various sporting activities. Indeed, our browser suggested we meant "snowboarding" or, much more ominously, "waterboarding".

Long ago in corporate history, even before Big Bang and the dot.com bubble, coaches, head hunters and personnel directors (for that was what they were called then) used to talk about the first 100 days. There was a generally accepted notion that the first three months or so of any appointment was the most critical period. This was the 'window of opportunity' - to use another favourite bit of jargon - for the new-comer to 'hit the deck running', make their impact on the organisation, achieve a few 'quick wins', and build a circle of allies for the tougher days ahead. First impressions counted because they tended to stick and no amount of 'repositioning' or 'remarketing' would fully shift them.

Fast forward two decades. The bosses of American businesses are now very well paid, and British bosses too have rapidly risen the 'pay ladder' because of global market forces. At the same time, turnover at the top has increased dramatically.

In the USA, 2005 saw 1322 departures, an all-time record. The first half of 2006 claimed another 728 executives, up a further 7%*. Some of these were very high profile, like Kraft and HP. In Europe, we have seen high profile changes in Airbus, with 4 CEOs in 18 months.

Shorter tenure at the top - typically less than four years now - means much more pressure to deliver results quickly and less time in which to be judged by the shareholders. Rather like politicians, they are expected to have picked their team and announced the outlines of a strategy - if not a fully worked out business plan - in the first few days... Then add in the fact that outside recruits come with a higher risk of failure than internal promotions. All this makes a compelling case for supporting the new entrants and investing significant amounts of time and money.

Not surprisingly, a number of organisations and academics have started writing about and offering onboarding as a new concept. Onboarding is devoted to helping a new executive climb on board successfully. More specifically, it is focused on helping directors joining boards, and in particular, helping new CEOs make a quicker impact. Indeed, we are aware of one company that even offers 'pre-boarding' to cover the period between accepting a job and officially starting!

This brings us to Keary Harper. Where were we while all this was going on: in typical British fashion, hiding our light under a bushel! But, more to the point, we have been applying these ideas since our formation 7 years ago.

We may not have branded it 'onboarding,' but our coaching programmes for new external recruits, or more commonly, internal promotions, focus precisely on the areas identified as key to a successful transition.

- Getting up to speed;
- Meeting expectations for achievement;
- Building a set of effective working relationships inside and outside the organisation.

We have built up a solid block of experience of supporting our clients in analysing relationships, and building action plans to address critical ones. This will include the basics of sorting out friends and enemies but goes well beyond into forging new relationships and re-prioritising the overall network. Some of these key relationships will be obvious - current executive and non executive Board members, big shareholders, employee groups. Some may be less so - key financial players, local and national politicians, environmental groups etc. Obviously who the key players are will differ significantly depending on the nature of the business, and we work with our clients to identify them quickly. We encourage them to build alliances with the priority players so that they can call on support - particularly when making changes of directions. Equally, they need to be aware of those who might try to undermine them: those passed over for the job in question; those representing the 'old' culture; and those with links to the previous incumbents.

We have pioneered the use of software to draw up highly focussed relationship maps, and to aid sharper development action plans. We have also developed a powerful diagnostic to analyse the level of trust within a team. A few tools and a degree of objectivity go a long way!

As for achievements, the obvious pre-condition is to ensure that everyone agrees what success looks like - always easier said than done - and then to demonstrate some quick and hard-to-contest victories within the first few weeks.

We too subscribe fully to the basic idea of the first 100 days being critical, but our experience tells us that the greatest value comes from longer programmes - at least six months. This sustained coaching means that once the individual has secured their initial credibility we can easily work with them on their style, their agenda for change, and on establishing a longer-term strategy for the business.

Whether it is called 'onboarding' or simply coaching - **100 days good: 200 days even better!**

* Research by the Challenger, Gray and Christmas consultancy

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This matters because they are more likely to reflect customer needs and influence company policy in marketing and other areas. How many consumers know or care what the board of Coca-Cola or Tesco looks like? As for the cult of 'celebrity' chief executives, what effect is Terry Leahy, Richard Branson, or Michael O'Leary likely to have on their respective brands?

At main board level things have moved in an adverse direction: boards are much smaller now, physically reducing the opportunity to create more diversity. Everyone agreed that women are still woefully under-represented on FTSE-100 boards but are making more progress in the next tier of companies – and as non-executives.

The debate then moved on from main boards – still seen as very formal and a collection of strong individuals rather than functioning teams – to the next level. Divisional boards, management committees or whatever they are called – this is the real area of action and opportunity to make diversity work. No-body wanted quotas but did want to work even harder to ensure their selection processes would recognise merit. With half the population being female and about one tenth being 'racial minorities' it is clear where natural selection should ultimately take the composition of our businesses.

Religion is currently an even more sensitive issue, especially with Islam outpacing Christianity in terms of active members. Several of our guests referred to the need to consult in depth to adapt their products to conform to sharia law. And, on a wistful note, one guest suggested that board 'away days' - and dinners like ours – might eventually need to change: no more alcohol as a social lubricant!

NEW COLLEAGUES

We are delighted to introduce Pam Billinge, Tanya Chakravarti and Alison Willocks, who joined our team during 2006. Before becoming full-time coaches, all three operated at senior levels in major organisations: Pam in Coopers & Lybrand, British Aerospace and Nokia; Tanya in various parts of the BBC; Alison in BAE SYSTEMS. Alison also has an academic role as Chair of the Coaching Steering Group at Lancaster University.



Pam Billinge



Tanya Chakravarti



Alison Willocks

To hear more about Keary Harper please do call us or see our new website

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