

Business Link for London

Situation

Business Link for London (BLL) was a public funded body of around 400 employees whose purpose was to support small and medium sized businesses within London. As a result of changes made by the Greater London Authority who were its funding body BLL management needed to:

1. Significantly reduce the number of its business advisors
2. Withdraw from funded programmes and either transfer the staff working in the programmes to a new provider or make them redundant
3. Reduce central support staffing to an appropriate level for the new organisation.

Chiumento HR Interim manager, Martin Hopping, was recruited as Interim HR executive for an initial period of three months to help facilitate these organisation changes. In addition, recent resignations from the HR team meant there was also a need for leadership within the team and help with operational HR support to the business.

Approach

Martin joined BLL at a time of peak HR activity. Planning for the above organisation changes was more or less complete and implementation was just starting. His early priorities were to finalise the content of the assessment centre for business advisors, help train the managers for the assessment centres and then to share leadership of the assessment sessions themselves. Working closely with senior managers gave Martin an early opportunity to establish his credibility for sound judgement and care for those employees being assessed. The assessment process was completed to timetable and the number of advisors was reduced as planned. All of the retained advisors were provided with comprehensive development plans based on the output from the assessment process. There were no employee appeals on the outcome of the process.

Martin was then asked to project manage a job evaluation and market salary review for all roles within the organisation. He and the client chose to use Monks job evaluation and to commission PriceWaterhouseCoopers for the pay survey. Martin's role was to operate the job evaluation panels, and work closely with senior management to ensure that the results were sensible and workable. The next step was to propose new salaries using the market data and results of the job evaluation. Finally, Martin communicated the new pay structure to the Employee Consultative Council and to the individual employees and managed an appeals process. Martin was commended by the CEO for strong negotiation skills and a pragmatic approach to sensitive pay issues. The new pay structure was implemented within 3 months of starting the project and a total additional cost of less than 0.5% of payroll.

Before the market salary review was concluded BLL learnt that it had not been granted an extension to its contract to provide advisory services. This meant that the following year all staff would either be transferred to the new service provider or be made redundant. Martin was offered a further extension of his contract to complete the transfer of the programmes staff, help reduce central staff numbers and manage

a smooth transfer of staff to the new provider. What had started as a 3 month contract ultimately grew to 15 months.

Over the next few months working closely with the Directors, Martin planned and implemented the TUPE transfer of several hundred programmes staff to other providers of public funded business support and a reduction in central support staff. Another priority was the retention and motivation of the core marketing, information and advisory teams who would be transferred to the new service provider. This was achieved through a strategy of leadership development and coaching skills for the extended management team, a beefed up programme of employee communication plus retention bonuses for those staff in key posts.

Results

This approach was very successful both in organisation performance – BLL had its most successful year's business results ever and in retaining the core team to transfer to the new provider.

Martin believes there were three main factors which underpinned his contribution over this period. These were:

1. Fresh energy when he joined the organisation which he was able to sustain because he was not facing the same uncertainties and concerns as the established team
2. A high level of competence of organisation change and TUPE transfers based on extensive recent experience
3. Good leadership skills and a genuine pleasure in working with the established HR team.

Learning

Martin left behind a more confident and competent group of managers who were better equipped to drive performance whilst simultaneously coaching and supporting their teams. All of the members of the HR team visibly developed over the period. The form this development took varied from person to person, some started or furthered their professional CIPD qualifications, others undertook specialist training in resourcing, mediation and coaching.

On a personal basis this assignment brought home to Martin, the critical importance of building and sustaining good workplace relationships and reminded him that having fun leads to higher team and personal performance.