



Jon Neill

**After seven years of business coaching, in 2016 we will turnover £8 million and we now employ a team of 70.**

Jon Neill started Sportsafe UK from his garage in Great Horkesley, Essex in 1997. Sportsafe UK is a service and maintenance company for sports and fitness equipment. In 2009, he had a wake-up call when the bank manager contacted him about late payment and Jon decided he needed help.

## Background

“I suspect that we started like many small businesses, my wife helped by answering the phone and I would juggle between working on the road as an engineer and the promotion of the company. After 12 months we were awarded our first council contract of 50 schools. Once we had won our first tender, the second and third soon followed and we started to employ staff.

“At this stage, the business began to grow at an uncontrollable rate meaning I was working over 90 hours a week with no holidays but profits remained low. The mistakes I had made recruiting some employees meant the culture was also out of control with the staff calling the shots and we very nearly lost the business at this point. I had a wake up call when the bank manager called me in, the tax office were chasing for payments, the staff

were playing up, and most areas of the business had little control or planning. It was time we either closed the doors and walked away or we got some help and turned it around. It was at this point, in 2009, that my accountant introduced me to my local ActionCOACH.

## First Improvements

“He asked us some searching questions and, to begin with, I was not sure I liked his hard approach but, after our initial alignment meeting, I decided to give it three months to see if it could make a difference. He told me straight away it would be at least a three-year plan. He said it would be hard work for me and that I needed to re-educate myself.

“We went back to basics – why did we set up, what’s the purpose, simple job descriptions and what did we expect team members to do, where did we have skills gaps and who to bring in to help me free up myself? In year one 80% of my staff left the company as they were unable or unwilling to change to a more positive working culture. It was then that I started to rebuild Sportsafe beginning with the foundations and the core of the business.”

## Ongoing Coaching

“Once the education and hard work started to take effect it was like a light coming on, all of a sudden the company started to flourish again, this time in a planned and controlled manner which didn’t rely solely on input from me. As the owner I once again had time back, this enabled me to plan and build. I then employed a team around me that complimented me. In the past, I had often set my sights too low and been afraid to employ better people than me, now many of our staff are better than me in their respective fields.

“My Action coach helped me focus on innovations that made Sportsafe a leader in our industry. We developed a system to automate quotes, invoices and reports so that before we have even left site we have completed these things for the customer whereas the industry standard was two weeks. Customers receive a notification when an engineer is en-route to site with photographic ID of the engineer for security. We became the first company in our industry to offer training schemes and development plans to employees and introduced low carbon and recycling schemes for customers. On top of that, we allowed easy payment schemes for our customers and started a loyalty scheme.”

“As our database has grown it has enabled us to control the new business we obtain by upselling. If we increase our marketing this, in turn, increases our sales and we can regulate the growth of the business very easily to help with planning. We are now implementing new divisions to the business including clothing, playground, court markings, canopies, compliance testing for lighting, CCTV, alarms and fire extinguishers in fact anything a school uses. We still remain focused on our core activity at all times as the loyal customer base is extremely valuable and not something we take for granted.

“Until three years ago we never had a sales team at all, it was all done by the general manager and myself. The sales team have not only converted sales but have built relationships with our customers and ensured they return to us year after year. The electronic walls in both offices at HQ display up-to-date information on jobs won or lost, sales in by the minute and current telephone data, as well as planned work for the year ahead.”



***“I have always been the owner of this business but now truly feel like a leader of the business.”***

### **The Results So Far**

“Since working with our Action coach, we have tried many different ways of reaching our potential customers, it was important to test and measure our activity. When Sportsafe was started the largest competitor in the UK at that time held just 19 contracts. We now service in excess of 18,000 individual sites across the UK which are annual repeat customers. That’s amazing considering it all started with one man and a van in a garage. It was not always this way and since our involvement with ActionCOACH new strategies and procedures implemented have seen the business flourish to its current form.

“The biggest pleasure for me as the owner is that these ideas and innovations are now coming from the team at Sportsafe, not just the management team but all members at all levels within the business.”

### **The Future**

“Our Action business coach was right, it did actually take 3 years. All of these developments meant that I got more and more of my time back. I had to realise that I was the MD and needed to direct the business, not spend my time sweeping the warehouse or counting nuts and bolts. I have always been the owner of this business but now truly feel like a leader of the business and for once I am controlling it and not the other way round. The future is very bright for us and I have some very high goals to reach for the future, all of which are easily achievable.

“Seven years on with ActionCOACH, we still use their tools to develop our team. They watch the videos, we have our own library of books, including those from Brad Sugars, and reading three books a quarter is a company requirement for all staff. Every member of staff has a 90-day plan which is logged on our computer system. We now have 14 managers who recently met Brad on one of his UK tours and many of them have received one-to-one coaching.

“The personal benefits have been astounding. For many years I went without a holiday as I could not afford to be away from the business for a whole week. Now I have many breaks, I love travelling and enjoying sharing the experience with my family.

“After seven years of business coaching, in 2016 we will turnover £8 million and we now employ a team of 70. It really is fantastic progress considering we turned over £45,000 in our first year after the bank had denied us a £4,000 loan for a van as they thought the business wouldn’t work!”

### **The Coach Perspective**

“Whatever the business sector, the constructs are the same to help any business grow. Most people try to build their business without a foundation and that is why they tend to sink and Jon’s story started with exactly that.

“ActionCOACH gave Jon a foundation to get his business to a point where he could take the time to work ON his business rather than IN it. His ability to embrace change meant that he could make the most out of our initial coaching sessions which then led to industry-leading innovations.”



[sportsafeuk.com](http://sportsafeuk.com)

**ActionCOACH**  
business coaching