



Receiving the Queen's
Award for Enterprise

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Aqua Cooling Solutions is the UK's leading specialist in industrial Aprocess cooling and associated products and services. Based in Fareham, Hampshire, they have been operating since 2001 and have just had their most profitable year in over 10 years.

Background

Kevin Lancaster is one of the company's founders and he explains why, even though they maintained business during the recent economic downturn, they chose to bring in an ActionCOACH business coach.

"My business partner, Simon, and I had a great combination of experience in both cooling engineering management and sales when we first started the company. Growth was good and this just plateaued during the recession. We weren't worried about the business and were confidently holding our head above water.

"By most standards £400k profit a year is great but there were other issues that were taking the enjoyment out of running the business. In particular, the people

management had started to become a headache and we felt less enthused to go in to work each day."

Meeting an ActionCOACH

"The idea of using a business coach hadn't occurred to us but our accountant knows our local ActionCOACH and I arranged to meet him during a game of golf. I already knew about ActionCOACH as I'd come across another of their coaches 12 years previously but, truthfully, the personality match and timing wasn't right back then.

"During our 18 holes, he wanted to understand what my business was all about and I liked his views on transitioning from being self employed to becoming a business owner. He could understand how we had come from developing our own company on the management experience we had accumulated in our employed lives and how we'd had to learn on-the-hoof. He gave a few suggestions on our options to move the business forward in terms of doing things better and putting in place some preventative measures to combat the recent difficulties we'd been experiencing.

"It all made sense to me and, this time, the personalities matched and the timing was right. But I still had to get my business partner's buy in before we could start working with him. So, I arranged a meeting and I was surprised at how quickly Simon saw how the business coaching could really benefit us."

First Improvements

"First off, we were really good at sales but were heavily reliant on Simon to bring home the orders. Simon found it difficult to remove himself from the day-to-day sales activity, to delegate and use his sales team. We agreed a process over 12 months to achieve that transition. It wasn't just about changing what Simon did but putting in place the systems to help the sales team confidently take over from Simon. The coaching helped us to articulate those systems so that our employees could understand them and take them forward. Having those systems written down took them out of our heads, gave us a chance to question them and meant that we could simply communicate them to every new team member. Without our ActionCOACH, we simply hadn't recognised the need for completing this task before and we'll continue to work on our systems for some time to come, not just in our sales team but across the company."

Ongoing Coaching

“The next big area for improvement was that we needed to find a way to stop all the niggles that came from people management in our business. Not only did we want to be happy to come to work every day but we wanted our staff to feel the same. We decided that we wanted to nourish our employees at work, not just pay them to be there. So our coach helped us to achieve that through focusing on good instruction within the workplace, defining clear roles for our teams, recognising individual ambitions, accommodating personal needs and providing truly constructive feedback.

“The single most significant thing for me was bringing in appraisals, ones that were formulated by us and specifically for our needs, not off-the-peg. We set charters for how people should behave at work and used these along with profiling tools during recruitment including using our new culture statement during interviews.”



“I can now say that I feel good about going into work every day.”

The Results So Far

“The results are clear for us and are much more than the 50% increase in net profit and 4 new employees. We have happier employees and, on a daily basis, work is much more rewarding for our management team. We have a map to follow to achieve the company’s vision and growth. All of the company owners share the same view on where we are headed and we have new tools in place to help us get there. We have targets and understand things such as how many employees it will take to reach each goal.

“The orthodox structure of the business feels stronger. The separate parts of the business work better together by speaking to key people who know it is part of their role to communicate up and down. We were recently awarded the Queen’s Award for Enterprise, the UK’s highest accolade for business success for our Aqua Leak Prevention System. I don’t think we would have considered this sort of accolade before we started to “think big” and this has opened up new geographical markets to the business including exporting to the Middle East, Africa and USA.

“On a personal level, I have been surprised to move myself out of a situation of contentment to one of ambition. It makes sense to have big goals in life and they drive you to achieve them.

“I have always had a good work-life balance so, unlike many business owners, I wasn’t looking to spend less time at work. I also wasn’t looking to make enough money to buy a holiday home or a new car. I wanted to remove that constant problem solving and aggravation that had begun to ruin my enjoyment of running my own business and I can now say that I feel good about going into work every day.”

The Coach Perspective

“It can be really rewarding working with people like Kevin and Simon who have a successful business but who say ‘good could be great!’. Over the last year they have redirected their energy to working ON rather IN their business. They are now thinking and acting like business owners instead of managers and the benefits are obvious.”



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business coaching