

RB's Food Emporium Case Study



Business Coaching for a retail Deli and restaurant

Introduction

RB's Food Emporium (RB's) at Lifestyle garden centre in Johannesburg, a specialty delicatessen, offered a 'bar-type' restaurant, where people got together, enjoyed great sushi, salads, ribs, fresh fish and shopped for special treats. Between 2003 and 2005, RB's was a great success and people loved the vibe as they enjoyed breakfasts, lunches and theme evenings such as sushi and prawn evenings, wine tasting evenings and especially the oyster festival once a year. RB's customers enjoyed the waiters and staff's special attention, such as fresh fish being filleted and spiced and even a lemon thrown into the purchase.

Situation

In 2006 the Lifestyle garden centre landlord decided to upgrade the centre and Rb's Food Emporium was downscaled to make way for the new building operations. The plan was for RB's to expand and provide a much larger restaurant and deli in the complex. However, building plans were significantly delayed and the RB's owner, a typical entrepreneur, decided to open a Mega deli, which would also be a head office to support the 3 other franchises. In setting up the Mega deli, he brought 2 new partners on board, both to run and manage Mega deli's operations.

The RB's owner has exceptional drive and passion for retail business, is a great sales person and loves to inspire and motivate people around him.

Relationships between the RB's owner and the landlord at Lifestyle garden centre deteriorated and the RB's owner decided to close the small deli at Lifestyle garden centre and merge it with the mega deli at Top Crop Centre, just a block away from Lifestyle garden centre. The merge, however was not as seamless as the owner expected. Whilst no staff lost their jobs, all staff and managers were now located in one shop, responsibilities were unclear, staff felt they were uprooted and generally there was no sense of direction and no trace of the old RB's vibe. Furthermore, regular customers were not aware that RB's have relocated or what happened to their favourite hangout.

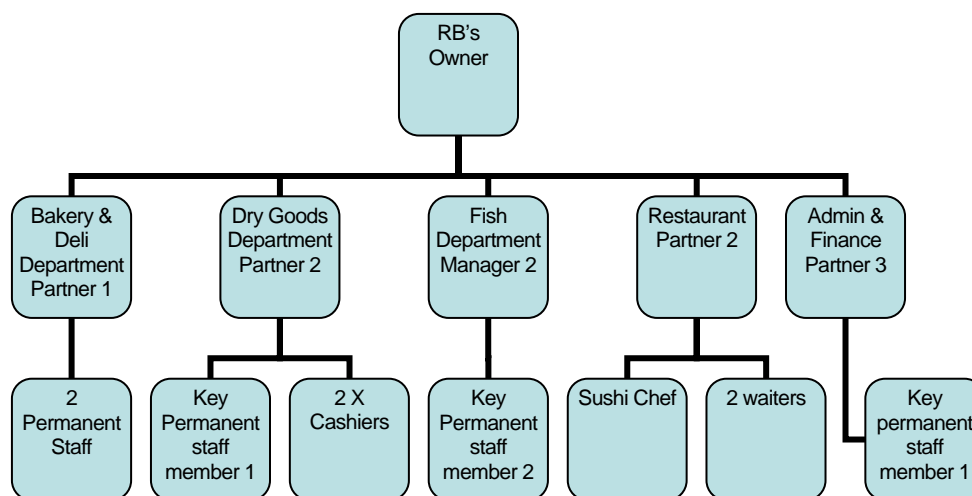


Challenges

- Business challenges the RB's owner faced, included:
 - starting from scratch to rebuild, refurbish and stock the Mega deli;
 - financial management challenges such as managing the cash flow, as RB's did not have any bank overdraft facilities;
 - managing suppliers and supplier relationships;
 - Marketing and sales:
 - RB's had to find an inexpensive marketing channel to communicate with old customers and attract new ones, and
 - RB's were not clear about what products customers wanted and which products should be discontinued.
- Management challenges that the RB's owner faced, included:
 - motivating his staff who felt despondent with their new location and loss of customers;
 - having the partners and management team stepping up, taking leadership and acting with confidence. However, the management team did not have the confidence to make decisions or take action and they all waited for the owner to make decisions;
 - no time or patience to transfer sales and operational skills to the new partners, and
 - poor communication between managers and staff.
- Personal challenges of the RB's owner and his management team included:
 - struggling to balance their time at work and their personal lives, which suffered a great deal under the business and emotional change pressures.



Company Structure



The full staff complement includes:

- 6 senior managers, of which 4 shared ownership;
- 8 Permanent staff, and
- 6 Casual staff.

Coaching Agreement and Approach

The business coaching engagement was focussed on enhancing business and employee performance. Firstly, business coaching objectives were identified to address the immediate needs of the business. The requirement was for the coaching intervention to enhance productivity/operational efficiency, sales growth and customer service. Secondly, individual coaching objectives were to coach the senior management team for uncovering individual strengths and weaknesses; communicating effectively and enhancing leadership skills.

Initially, RB's owner believed that coaching the senior management team would suffice and the rest of the staff would not need to be coached.

The engagement was structured to include monthly management team coaching sessions, supported by weekly individual and 3 way small team coaching sessions. Individual assessments were done for the management team, which allowed monitoring the progress of the business and individual coaching objectives.

Insight

As the coaching process progressed, quotes were collected from key staff and managers, to give insight into the RB's case:

- "Coaching has made me more aware of the importance of listening to my staff, collaborating with them on issues to get their buy-in and motivating them on a daily basis. I have been able to focus more on the detail and have been able to empower my staff to be creative and innovative with the display of our goods" – Partner 1.

- “Coaching has helped us to become more focussed and goal oriented. We know what we want to create for the future of RB’s and are working with a purpose to achieve it. We have implemented some great innovative ideas, such as the display of recipe books and offering tasting at the fish counter, which made a huge impact on my department’s sales.” Key permanent staff member 1.
- “Coaching has made me aware that I needed to take control of my team and communicate more explicitly what is expected, even though I thought they were supposed to know what to do. I outlined each person’s roles, responsibilities and who will support them; I outlined daily operational guidelines and gave each department a monthly and daily sales target. The coach also became my sounding board to coach me in handling difficult decisions and conversations.” – RB’s owner.
- “In coaching the RB’s team, I believe that the success of the coaching approach was 3 fold: focussing on what they were already good at; coaching them to apply empowerment principles to improve their management style and communication and furthermore, I used the power of “reframing”, helping them focus on what can be done vs what can’t be done” – Business Coach.

Results

- Early on, into the coaching engagement, it became evident that the rest of the staff needed to be included in the coaching process.
- Intangible results the management team experienced, include:
 - a sense of urgency for priority projects and tasks;
 - improved leadership and management skills – as they started to identify their personal strengths and trusted own abilities, started taking action and showing leadership;
 - improved communication all around, as they started to understand each other better and started to be a cohesive team;
 - Improved focus on priorities and what they are good at;
 - A shift from “we can’t do” mode to a “What/ How can we” mode, and
 - Spirits lifted, management became more enthused, as the Coach held and kept reminding them of the vision for what they wanted to create.
- The management team also became more aware of the importance of work-life balance in order to be more productive, able to handle the stresses of the business and have the support of family and friends.
- The vision, mission and values were never articulated or formalised. Formulating these and communicating it, helped to focus the team on the future that they wanted to create. This process seemed to create a power that pulled them forward:

Vision: *“To create the best store in Joburg, that is a destination, where people meet, chat and enjoy a feast of top quality products and customer service”*

Mission: *“With passion, positive attitude, and service develop the rb’s brand to be in a league of its own, to attract people to buy and enjoy top quality products and great food.”*

Values: *“Conduct business in ethical manner, with honesty & integrity; to serve, honor and respect ourselves & others; to be humble, to have gratitude, and to live spiritually, in relation to God”*

- Coaching allowed the management team to craft RB's success formula:

Success = Vision + Attention to detail

When we unpacked this formula, it meant offering quality food; being available to customers; creating a vibe and atmosphere for customers and staff; cleanliness and tidiness; open communication between staff and management, and allowing competition between departments.

- Individual coaching objectives were all achieved as each person's personal foundation were strengthened, integrity restored and the awareness of the importance of trust in relationships were established.
- Business coaching objectives were all achieved as RB's sales revenue increased into double-digits, as a result of the implementation of innovative sales growth projects; productivity and operational efficiency were tightened, as operational guidelines and discipline were established , and customer service improved as a result of extended trading hours, extended restaurant menu and weekend special events.