

Case Study



“ *Business ignites for Kiln Flame Systems* ”

From experience, Richard Manning and Cliff Rennie managing directors of Kiln Flame Systems, (KFS) have always been very cynical about taking advice from outside the company.

So, when Richard and Cliff decided to take their redundancy money and start fresh with KFS in 1999, they used their combined 40 years experience and adopted a back to basics approach.

However, in December 2005, over 6 years into the new venture, they decided to bring an Action Coach onboard. Cliff explained, “ActionCOACH contacted us several times and we agreed to meet – albeit skeptically! Of course I’m glad we did otherwise we would never have met our coach.”

KFS was not a true start-up business. It was already well established and growing every year, helping companies reduce fuel usage and emissions through its advanced combustion technology. It had purchased a lot of technology and assets from the previous company together with the work force and had managed to focus and develop that technology to produce new products and approaches to problem solving. What the two founders needed from a coach was and a good business strategy for how to continue to develop the business.

After meeting their Action Coach, Richard and Cliff originally agreed to work with him for a 6 month period, however he has been with the company ever since!

Cliff explains, “There was just something about our Action Coach - no marketing rubbish - he was straight forward. While he readily assimilated what KFS was about, he immediately highlighted some points that struck home with both Richard and me - things we should have been doing already and things we shouldn’t.

“When our coach joined us, we had been trading successfully for several years, but we were very much still in start-up mode. We had a healthy amount of business coming in, but no clear structure in place and no particular future plan. Being an engineering business we have a lot of large one-off jobs, we aren’t an ordinary company, we operate in an unusual sector - but this didn’t faze him at all.

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Their business coach implemented three specific changes in the business. Firstly, he linked personal goals with business goals.

“He got us to think about exactly what we wanted to achieve out of life,” says Cliff, “and to stop looking at the business as an entity on its own. We can now see our positioning and where we want to be this time next year and so on. It might sound simple, but it makes such a massive difference.”

Secondly, their coach helped the business owners look at the financial side of things. They analysed absolutely everything and he helped them put together a budget plan with easy to interpret key performance indicators to manage the business on a month by month basis. He then disciplined them to produce ongoing budgets in future years.

“Kiln Flame Systems is now a very profitable business with a £1.5 million turnover and working with some of the leading international companies in pulp & paper, lime and alumina industries. “Our Action Coach has definitely helped us take the next steps” adds Cliff.

Thirdly, he implemented an annual strategy meeting. This meeting helps the team at KFS review their current situation and plan ahead. They get out of the office for a day and sit down together discussing ideas. They sketch out a plan for the coming year and set targets.

“Having our coach with us to implement these changes has helped us, not just think differently, but actually do things differently too. On the whole, it is just Richard and I working with Action, but that said, staff have seen a difference too, not just in finance, planning and marketing, but in how we work together as a team. Our coach acts as a non-executive director, free to tell us things we might not like to hear!”

For example, Action Coach has helped the company focus on starting and finishing projects, rather than from time to time drifting in and out of them. As a team, they set objectives for each project, with specific scope and timescale. Having this formal system in place ensures all employees know precisely where they are and what is expected from them.

Cliff again:

“Action Coach has added structure to our businesses, improved technical and marketing development. There is no question in my mind that our coach has improved, not only the financial performance and focus of the business, but also the performance and drive of our personnel.”

The numbers bear this out. After ActionCOACH came on board, turnover grew by 75% and actual profit trebled. Even in the last year, a tough one in this industry and markets, KFS have significantly over achieved their budget on both turnover and profit.

“Added to this, he is a very personable chap, who speaks our language and got to grips with the business very quickly even though it wasn’t an easy industry to understand,” concludes Cliff.