

Case Study

LIGHTSAVE FULLER READ Case Study



“ *Lights...
ActionCOACH
...Profit* ”

There is always room for good businesses to improve. For instance Reading based Lightsave Fuller Read is a well-established business. Owned by Alan and Kathy Kilford, it has been trading for eighteen years, seeing a steady year-on-year growth. Turnover was further accelerated by the buy-out of a heating and electrical supplier some seven years ago, which allowed an increase in sales margins. Through electricians, plumbers and maintenance service providers, Lightsave Fuller Read now supplies councils, hospitals, hotel groups and universities, including prestigious establishments such as Imperial College and the Science Museum, with replacement light bulbs, commercial light fittings, cables, sockets, switches and suchlike. Recently, increasing focus has been on carbon and LED energy saving products and sales are driven by two salesmen who, through personal contacts, have built up a solid customer base over the years.

Despite this success, MD Alan Kilford was always conscious that the business could be performing better, and that he himself should and could be doing more to make things happen. But he faced the problem of many a director or boss of a small or privately owned company, in that he had no one to whom he had to report or be accountable. Nobody to set him targets.

“I was too immersed in the day-to-day running of the business to be able to see the bigger picture,” he says. “There were many things I wanted and needed to be doing strategically, but I was always too busy. Something else always cropped up that took priority because it seemed like it had to.”

In an attempt to change this status quo, Alan had been looking for a business coach to give him some accountability, as well as inspiration, direction and advice. He met with several potentials but did not feel he could work with them. So when he was contacted by ActionCOACH, he was happy to agree a meeting. Ironically, the arrangement nearly fell at the first hurdle. Alan cancelled the first meeting for the very reason he had agreed to it in the first place...because he was too busy!

It was rescheduled, and as soon as Alan met his Action Coach he knew he was the ‘right man’.

“ActionCOACH seemed to offer all the right options,” Alan says. “The programme was clear and concise. The results achievable, some quickly and others more long term.”

ActionCOACH’s mantra is to get company bosses working on the business not in it. And that is just what Alan knew he needed to do.

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Yet he was still reluctant to commit, because he was too busy. However on the grounds that he'd always find an excuse not to go ahead, he decided to take the plunge, especially when he discovered that funding provided by Government for business training would cover the cost of ActionCOACH's fees for the first couple of months.

He opted for the package whereby his Action Coach would meet with him once a week to set goals and review progress.

"Initially my coach wanted to know more about my business," Alan explains. "Impressively, one of the first things he did was to help me look for ways that would make him pay for himself. We reassessed customer markets and looked primarily at increasing margins."

Prices were an early area of focus. At first Alan was hesitant about putting prices up, especially during a recession, but found that doing so had no impact in terms of loss of customers, since his company was known for its service. The result was that profit rocketed by 5% within just two months of embarking on the ActionCOACH programme.

The next thing was to give Alan his own office so that he could focus and not be constantly distracted by, as he puts it 'the desire to impart my knowledge' on his colleagues. Alan's number two, Mark, was left in charge of running the office whilst Alan himself moved into a new and private area where he could concentrate on the agreed goals. These included reviewing strategies, processes, overheads, looking at a measured marketing campaign and scripting how to approach customer complaints and returns.

One major project was to produce a catalogue, something that Alan had been hoping and planning to do for a long time but 'never quite had the time.' Another was to launch a website for a specialist heating product. Alan had shied away from internet-based selling before because he never thought it would work for his customers, but now he has realised that there is a real market for niche products sold online and is looking at offering more.

Other major changes were implemented too. For instance a process was set up whereby figures are now reviewed and monitored on a weekly basis. Weekly team meetings were also scheduled in order to discuss targets and ideas and these soon lead to improved delivery systems, better stock keeping and warehouse reorganisation.

The overall results have been striking, with significant gains through growth of existing customers and new business wins. For the first time ever Lightsave Fuller Read's turnover has broken the one million mark, at £1.2 million, leaping from £900K the previous financial year and its all important profit margin has increased from 36% to 44%. These increases would be impressive at any time, but in the middle of a recession they are spectacular.

But Alan is not stopping there and is continuing to see his Action Coach once a week. Part of the next ninety-day plan includes seeking referrals from customers and a marketing campaign targeting hotels and schools.

Alan concludes: "For me the most beneficial aspect of the ActionCOACH experience has been that it pushes me to do the jobs I know should be done but I've always said I'm too busy to do. The business was running along fine as it was, but there is always room for improvement – and our improvement has been incredible."

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