

Case Study

Keates Hulme Case Study



“Coaching has focused us on the key issues”

Keates Hulme are a property sales and lettings company in Stoke-On-Trent. They work across the residential and commercial property sectors. The business was set up in 1996 and is owned and run by Richard and Andrew Johnson and Chris Hulme. They also offer property surveys and in fact the business principals are Chartered Surveyors. This was one of the issues that Richard felt was a problem “We were surveyors, not business people.”

The lack of business knowledge was felt most keenly when they purchased another small company in 2008 and tried to merge the businesses. They struggled to get the staff and processes to work together. Then when the recession started to bite they had to make two people redundant. This put more strain on the owners. As Richard remarked “We were running around like mad but just couldn’t seem to get things moving.”

They continued to struggle in attempting to get the merged companies to move forwards. However, they found it hard to get people into the right roles and drive enough business. This was frustrating for the team. As they said “Every time we did something which worked we then lost something else in another area.”

Around this time Richard’s brother, who owned another company, was having great success with the help of a business coach from ActionCOACH. So Richard felt confident that the coach could help them also. They knew they needed some business advice and support themselves so signed up to 1-2-1 coaching with ActionCOACH. The three owners and their coach started to meet in October 2011 and now get together every week to set objectives and action plans.

The first thing their coach asked the team to do was to fill in a detailed questionnaire. Importantly this highlighted what each person wanted from the business. This opened their eyes to a key issue straight away. As Richard said “We all wanted different things from the business. For example I was looking at the long term strategic direction, another was more lifestyle driven and the third was focused on cost control.”

From this position their coach helped the team to define what the vision for the business should be. They also developed a clear 90 day plan on how to start to achieve the vision. The team got through the plan in half the time but it highlighted other areas that needed addressing.

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Most importantly they realised they needed to get all the staff working more efficiently and that staff members were in the wrong roles. So their coach introduced them to DISC profiling which enabled them all to understand each other's strengths and weaknesses better. Richard remarked "The profiling allowed us to move the right people into the right positions. It also showed us that we could use staff for a more sales led approach."

The sales and marketing side of the business was also an area they worked on closely. Before working with ActionCOACH they didn't measure the effectiveness of their marketing efforts. So their coach encouraged them to 'test and measure' all their activities. This quickly showed them that some advertising they did was not worth the budget. So they moved the budget into areas which did perform better. As Richard remarked "It actually cut our marketing costs almost overnight. But the results were outstanding."

The importance of measurement and tracking is a key element of the ActionCOACH approach. Before coaching the team didn't have any key metrics in place that they monitored on an on-going basis. So their coach introduced them to the ActionCOACH '5 ways' model which tracks metrics such as leads through to sale value and margins. These metrics ultimately affect profitability and Richard and the team are now putting rigorous tracking of these metrics into place.

Much of the work they have done together to date has been aimed at creating the strong framework that they struggled with before. They have implemented a new sales system including a marketing database. They monitor their key metrics via a 'dashboard' and crucially have the right people in the right roles. As Richard said "We are now able to focus on driving new business."

Although they haven't really started to drive new business leads the changes they made in the first six months have had a tremendous effect. The original 12 month revenue target they set was reached in only four months. So they have now increased the monthly target by 50%.

Their coach has also helped them to manage their time more efficiently. Previously the three principals 'were doing everything'. Now they have a stronger team and can take step back and let them get on with it. This means that Richard, Andrew and Chris can focus more on their agreed primary roles. As Richard said "We have more time for ourselves now. We work more efficiently and have a plan to only work four days a week by the end of the year."

In conclusion Richard feels that coaching has helped them in all areas of the business but the focus it has brought to them as individuals and the company itself has been vital. Plus, having an objective outsider bringing in different viewpoints and holding them accountable has ensured they actually get things done. As Richard said "I'd recommend business coaching to everyone. Plus I'm enjoying the process immensely."

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