

## “One thing we can do better”

I was quite taken last week with a story that I heard about how a local Cairns businessman operates a process of continual business improvement.

It is a small business. This bloke is a sole practitioner. He employs just two other people; his personal assistant, and a receptionist/gofer. Being such a small office, there is continual interaction between the three, which of course has resulted in constant and very clear internal communication and understanding. No need to stand on formalities here!



Nevertheless, a protocol has developed that has seen the first hour of each Monday morning set aside for a formal management meeting. Here they adhere to a structured agenda which, as you might expect, largely revolves around plans and issues for the upcoming weeks work schedule, together with the more mundane but necessary housekeeping matters.

But the point of the story that really got my attention, was the last item on the agenda. This was simply titled “This week’s - One thing we can do better”.

Such a simple statement, but just reflect upon the power that it conveys. This little business has implemented at least one improvement every single week over the last ten years. The cumulative effect is an enormous achievement! It’s no surprise that the business is extremely successful, and is recognised as such in its industry and markets.

Irrespective of the small scale of the business operation, the anecdote serves to demonstrate a number of important and progressive management philosophies that, if adopted, can be beneficial to all manner of businesses of all shapes and sizes. Some of these are:

- **Programmed communication:** Scheduled meetings provide an opportunity to ensure that communication is complete, and also minimise the chance of important matters falling between the cracks. For best effect, the purposes of the meeting should be clear and participants should be well prepared and mentally attuned to the matters to be discussed. Agenda’s should be structured, and brief minutes of resolutions should be taken for follow up action. Meetings should take no longer than is necessary.
- **Culture of progressive improvement:** A standing agenda item of “How can we improve?” clearly challenges every participant to be constantly striving to find opportunities where a difference can be made. Usually it will follow that ideas are thought through and prepared in advance of presentation to the

meeting. After a while, this discipline will become a constant state of mind, and ultimately a vibrant and entrenched culture.

- **Suggestion box:** People at the coal face are often in the best position to identify opportunities for improved processes and systems and will, with the right degree of support, usually be enthusiastic to proactively look for better ways of doing things. Invite their input. Listen to their suggestions. Encourage their initiative. Allow them ownership of good ideas, and celebrate their successes.
- **Working on the business:** The fact that this is an ongoing agenda item also imposes a discipline on the management team that ensures that some time is allotted (every week) to working “on the business”. As the adage goes, it is otherwise too often the case that we get tied up in working in the business, at the expense of longer term ambitions.
- **Inclusive decision making:** The proposals for change that have the best chance of success are those that have the support (or at least the understanding) of the greatest number of players on the team. Care should additionally be taken to ensure consultation with all relevant areas of the business that might be impacted by proposals for change and that all implications are identified and assessed.

Just imagine what your business might look like at this time next year if you simply do one thing better every week. Good luck!!

Cheers

Cam Charlton - Director

**KLEINHARDT**  
BUSINESS CONSULTANTS  
cam@kleinhardt.com.au