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101 WAYS TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

Hugh Williams

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101 Ways to Grow Your Business
by Hugh Williams FCA

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For convenience (and for no other reason) 'him', 'he' and 'his' have been used throughout and should be read to include 'her', 'she' and 'her'.

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Essentials for your business

18 Employ happy people

Your employees are the people your customers meet. So if you employ happy, friendly people with engaging smiles, not only will this please your customers but it will attract new friendly customers to come and do business with you.

The great explorer Sir Earnest Shackleton employed happy, friendly people and my hunch is that their outlook on life was one of the key reasons why, on his extraordinarily dangerous, and famous, boat journey – an unplanned journey forced on him by the break-up of his ship – he didn't lose a single man.

19 Don't do it on the cheap

I learnt this lesson to my cost with my car. I normally get it serviced in a smart (and yes, expensive) garage just down the road from my office. On one occasion I decided to get the servicing done in another garage – this time in a back street.

I thought that their friendly faces meant that they would do just as good a job as the smart one. How wrong I was. Here is my tale of woe:

The smart one	The cheap one
They always kept me informed as to how my car's servicing was going and when the car was going to be ready	The just waited for me to turn up when I imagined the car would be ready

They always asked if there was anything, apart from the service, that needed doing	There was no chat at the outset and they just said 'thanks 'when I handed over the keys
They always cleaned the car inside and out	They had no complimentary cleaning service
They had a special area where they would look after me – an area for customers	When I called to collect the car, I had to fight my way through the workshop to the office with girlie calendars exposing not just the usual fare but, more importantly, the state of the minds of both the workers and the bosses there
They filled in the service record that lives in the car	They never filled in the service record
They still have my custom	They will not service my car again

But my story doesn't quite end there. A few years later I had a fault with my car and it was out of warranty. It was a part that shouldn't have failed and the smart garage offered to pay for it themselves. But when they sent the paperwork up to head office for their confirmation, because I had had one service at another garage, the amount they were prepared to pay was just 25 per cent of the bill. It never pays to go for the cheaper option!

It will, therefore, always pay you to provide the quality service and all the things I've listed above are little things that cost next to nothing to provide.

20 Reputations are important

One way to create a great reputation is to take note of what others do wrong to you and vow never to do that to your customers.

This is a story from my friend Ted Johns, the Chairman of the Institute for Customer Service.

I won't mention the store but it's a famous one and you've probably visited it. Ted tried to return a product to the Y chain; not because he didn't like the item, but because it was faulty. He complained to Trading Standards about the situation where it took him one and a half hours to get his money back from the store for a £150 faulty phone system. In response, Trading Standards said to Ted, 'Well, you know where you went wrong, don't you? You went in there. You won't catch one of us shopping there.' This was Trading Standards' view of that chain!

The message of this sort of anecdote is as follows:

- Reputations take a long time to win but can be lost in a trice.
- Customers are crying out for shops they can trust, receptionists that empathise and banks that listen.
- Organisations must learn to say sorry sooner.
- High performance, world-class customer service isn't the sole preserve of First Direct, Banyan Tree Hotels, Amazon, John Lewis and Pizza Express.

21 Be sensitive to the personal needs of your employees

If an employee has a problem, such as a difficulty at home, give him the space to sort it out. If you treat him as you would like to be treated if you were suffering from the same thing, you have no idea how much loyalty it will generate and this will lead to the employee respecting your philosophy and continuing to practise great service for your customers.

22 Guarantees

The purpose of guarantees is often overlooked or misunderstood. When, in our accountancy firm, I mentioned to our first customer that if she wasn't happy with the service our staff provided, she was not under any obligation to pay us a bean, she was amazed. 'Wow,' she said, 'you must feel really confident about the quality of your service.'

Funnily enough, it was rather us accepting a cold dose of reality. If we had let this lady down and provided her with a truly lousy service (and all of us can find that we screw up from time to time) and she had no intention of paying us, and we ended up in court and lost, we would not get paid. And even if we had ended up in court and won but she still refused to pay, we still would not have got paid.

So the reality is, if we (and I'm including you in this sentence) produce something for which our customer refuses to pay, we're very unlikely to get paid.

So why not come out with this reality upfront and say at the first meeting, 'If you don't feel that you have received what you consider to be value for money, we don't expect to get paid – and you are the only judge in this matter.' It's a very powerful guarantee, yet it's simply reflecting reality.

The beauty is that nobody ever does this, so this promise really stands out. It has won our small accountancy firm two national awards – our guarantee (which says just this) blew all the other finalists' submissions away and the award panel said that we were clear winners.

Guarantees cost so very little to implement. Very seldom are you taken for a ride and when you are, you don't do business with that person again. Yet guarantees are the things which, if properly publicised, give strangers the confidence to approach you and want to buy from you. Such assurance makes them believe that you will care more about serving them than filling your pockets.

It's no good saying that 'our products are guaranteed' because everyone says this and it means nothing. No, you should think about providing a number of specific guarantees, such as:

- if we don't show up within a half hour of an agreed time, you won't have to pay; or
- if you find that you don't like our product, bring it back within a month and you'll get a full no-quibble refund.

Think of an amazing guarantee and then see how well it goes down.

23 Put the price up (part 1)

This is the bit we all hate doing. We say, ‘But I can’t do that. Our customers would never wear it. They’d go elsewhere.’ If this is your attitude, then you are wrong.

So often I have advised clients to put their prices up by over 20 per cent and it’s made all the difference to their businesses and indeed their lives.

The truth is that you have far more of a problem with your price than your customers ever do. What they look for isn’t price but value for money. Well, some buy purely on price and if you are in that market, all well and good. But for most businesses, customers buy on value for money, service and convenience.

Let me tell you what happened when we put the price of one of our services up by 25 per cent. This added about £20,000 to our turnover. We lost about ten clients, but the ones we lost were the ones we didn’t like anyway and they were small fry (their business accounted for no more than £2,000). So was it worth adding £18,000 to our bottom line and losing a number of unpopular customers at the same time? You bet it was.

Now, your competitors will never put your prices up. It’s you that has to make the decision; so just go ahead and do it.

One way to do it is to introduce some new wonderful guarantee at the same time and possibly add in more than one. Make the guarantee so outrageous that its impressiveness completely dwarfs the fact that the price is going up.

However, if you are still worried that you’ll lose too many customers, just look at the following chart and see, if you were to put your prices up by a certain percentage, how many customers you could afford to lose before you lose out. You will see that our experience is no freak occurrence.

If your present margin is...									
	20%	25%	30%	35%	40%	45%	50%	55%	60%
Your sales would have to fall by the following percentage before your profits decline...									
And you increase your price by...									
2%	9	7	6	5	5	4	4	4	3
4%	17	14	12	10	9	8	7	7	7
6%	23	19	17	15	13	12	11	10	9
8%	29	24	21	19	17	15	14	13	12
10%	33	29	25	22	20	18	17	15	14
12%	38	32	29	26	23	21	19	18	17
14%	41	36	32	29	26	24	22	20	19
16%	44	39	35	31	29	26	24	23	21
18%	47	42	38	34	31	29	26	25	23
20%	50	44	40	36	33	31	29	27	25
25%	56	50	45	42	38	36	33	31	29
30%	60	55	50	46	43	40	38	35	33

24 Free audits

The word 'audit' is more of an American term than a description of an accountant auditing books. It means doing a survey of your prospective customers' needs, presenting them with a report and not charging them for the work.

Most suppliers say 'free estimates' but that's just boring – everyone does it. Instead, if you are a carpet cleaner, for example, you could offer to visit someone's home and carry out a free survey of:

- the state of the cleanliness of his carpets;
- the mites that are in them; and
- their state of repair.

You will then provide him with:

- a properly presented bound report; plus

- an estimate of what the remedial work will cost; and
- details of all your guarantees.

Such an approach is seen to be caring, professional, helpful and valuable.

It will mean that, if he sees that this is how you approach your prospective customers and compares this approach with what your rivals are doing, you are extremely likely to be called to provide the estimate.

Why not look at your rivals' adverts in the *Yellow Pages* and see what they offer. It's unlikely to be a patch on what is being suggested. I have just looked at the carpet cleaning section in our local *Yellow Pages* and I couldn't see one that was offering a carpet audit.

This isn't rubbishing the advertisements I have just seen. Carpet cleaners probably have the best *Yellow Pages* advertisements there are – these people are very hot on providing valuable guarantees and they know their stuff about customer care. But, to get the customers' attention in the face of this impressive opposition, you have to show more than caring – you have to seem to shout, 'Hey, you, yes, you, the person who wants his carpets cleaned, don't pick up the phone to the first advertiser you see – don't part with your money, or think of doing so, until we have provided you with a free report. Then, once you know what needs to be done, pick whoever you want to do it. We hope it'll be us, but if it is, we want to have earned your business, not sold it to you purely on the basis of some flashy ad.'

Could you provide a free audit for your customers?

25 Free offers

When you see most adverts, you pass over them quickly. We don't tend to buy a newspaper to read the advertisements; our interest is likely to be on the front page, some general news, the letters page, the sports pages and perhaps the crossword. We might have bought the paper to look at the classified advertisement page, but we're highly unlikely to spend time looking at the advertisements.

The reason we treat such advertisements with disdain is because we're saying to ourselves, 'What's in it for me?' We usually have no interest in buying a car,

a new TV or booking a holiday – we simply want some peace and quiet in which to read the newspaper and, frankly, the advertisements get in the way.

But if we have seen an advertisement with a free offer (something of value), then we might just spend some time thinking about it. Such offers are potentially much more interesting than just sales pitches.

You could offer a free:

- consumer awareness guide;
- non-committal first meeting;
- phone call (a freephone number);
- postage service (Freepost is an excellent way of helping customers do business with you).

If you can't think of anything free to offer then either:

- look at what your rivals are offering in the *Yellow Pages* – you are bound to spot something there which you could crib; or
- hold a customer advisory board (see point 93). Call in about ten customers and when asking them 'How can we look after you better?', add 'Is there anything we could supply for free?' They are bound to come up with ideas.

Make sure that you offer them something free and you'll notice that your rate of converting prospects into sales improves immeasurably.

26 Systematise

I apologise if this sounds boring, but within this word lies the secret of just about everything anyone may want from a business. The way this works is as follows:

When you think about it, just about everything you do in your business is repetitive. While this principle may not apply to a brain surgeon's job (although I suspect it does), most of the work we do today is the same as what we did yesterday.

If this is the case, it probably doesn't have to be us who always have to do those tasks. If we were being watched by someone yesterday doing what we did, it may not take that person too long to work out what it is that we do and he could start doing it for us. Indeed, in the case of most businesses, if the owner is ill (and so long as there is more than just the owner working in the business), the business tends to carry on without him, and it sometimes carries on much better without him!

If, therefore, you were to take a long hard look at what it is that you do each day (perhaps listing everything down in some detail – how you do it, etc.), it should be possible to get someone else to start doing some of what you do. Wouldn't this free up your time, providing you with the opportunity to take a better look at your business, where it's going and when it might become something of real value?

But, if you are to escape some of your (probably self-made) rat-race, you do have to effect this change deliberately.

I'll come to the golden rules in a moment, but first of all let's just look at what I'm envisaging in action. You may or may not like the example I give but it's the principle I'm espousing here, not the particular. If you were to go into a Kentucky Fried Chicken in this country or one in a different country, you know pretty well, before you enter the place, what it's going to look like. Why is this? Because they are all built around systems. They have systems and the employees are trained how to use and sometimes help contribute to the development of their systems.

So if you want to emulate them and develop systems in your own business, here are the golden rules:

- List in some detail what you do – all those things you would like to get someone else to do for you. This process will be your system.
- Get someone from your organisation (or hire someone fresh) and train them to do this stuff for you. This will show you just how easy it is to manage a business that runs on systems.
- Watch how much the person you hand the process over to enjoys it and how he starts to develop the system into something better than it was before.

27 Delegate

This follows on directly from the previous point. If you have systems that others can follow, use and help to run your business, then you must delegate this work to them.

To some people ‘delegating’ is a dirty word. It sounds like getting rid of the work you don’t want to do: palming it off to some poor soul who cannot refuse to do it. I hope, by the time you have finished this short point, that you will see that proper delegating is a valuable tool in your business growth armoury.

The first point about delegating is that you have to do it. The saying goes that if you can free up your time by (probably) 80 per cent, you will have created a huge reservoir of time for you to plan and manage your business.

The second point is, and this may surprise you, that if you pass on some of your responsibilities to someone working with you, he is far more likely to get excited by the opportunity this affords him than being brassed off by having more work to do. Employees love to excel and, when it comes to giving them new jobs, work and responsibilities, they are likely to relish what you give them, rather than resent it.

If you give them the job to do, then give them the tools of the job as well. Give them free rein to do it and say, ‘This system is the one I have been using. If you can think of a better one, let me know and, chances are, I’ll give you the wherewithal to try out your ideas.’

So, having got this far, you will find that, in a short space of time, they could easily be doing the job better than you were. None of us can assume that our method is the best or the only method there is. After all, two heads are often better than one, and the very act of delegating could well spark a whole new method of working and an improvement to the bottom line.

With delegating comes the need to train and this means that time and money must be invested in making sure the person understands what it is that he should be doing. He may even need to go on a course or get an extra qualification. But by investing in your people, you will find that they reward you with better work, better systems, a happier workforce and better profits. Not a bad deal, eh?

28 Trust your employees

There is a tendency for some business owners not to trust their employees. Such proprietors tend to regard their workers with suspicion (I suspect they regard everyone, not just their employees, with suspicion); they may think that these people are after their wage packet on the cheap and are in the business of diddling the firm and its owners through their expense claims. Along with this scenario, such employers are always checking up on and criticising the work that's been done and, as a result, there is a disconsolate atmosphere around everyone, with nobody trusting anyone else. This is sad and if you find you are working in such a place, I suggest you find another employer.

I would like to start from a completely different viewpoint and repeat the little-known but nonetheless penetrating slogan that reads 'people love to excel'. We all love doing well. When we win a race at our school sports day, when we got good marks in class, even if our football team does well, we love the pleasure that goes with success and this good effect that success brings is one that, I believe, should be encouraged throughout all places of work.

This is one of the reasons why I think going in for awards is important. Even if you don't go very far the first time you enter, you will learn from the experience and, as time goes by, you will find that your business rises in the pecking order – and this is good for everyone's morale. Chances are, you will win something (some recognition) in due course and have a trophy or prize-winning photograph to hang in your reception. Believe me, customers do notice and appreciate evidence that you are better than the rest.

What does trusting your employees consist of?

- First of all, you must like and respect them. If you don't do so, then there is a problem and I'm not sure what I'd suggest, except that you should try harder!
- You must give them responsible work to do and give them free rein to do it. They will need training, but couple the training with the invitation to review what they find as they do the job and tell them that if it seems to them that there's a better way, you would like to hear their ideas. Please don't appear to be checking up and

criticising their work all the time. ‘Oh no, you’ve got it all wrong. I’ll do it myself if you can’t do it’ is a terrible thing to say and a terrible conclusion if that is what they discover you are thinking after you have taken the work back.

- Review their work and thank them for what they have done. Talk to them about it, show them why this new work is important to the success of the business, ask them how they feel it went, if they are happy to be doing it and then consider if there is anything else they might take on.

And the benefits of this process are twofold. Not only are they happier, but also you will find that you are able to do other things with the time you now have available.

29 Make your customers laugh

I’m glad that I fell upon this one. If I hadn’t stumbled across it, I probably wouldn’t have believed it.

At my company we send our newsletter to our clients. We used to share the costs of doing so with some fellow firms and it went down well but, one day, we decided that we wanted to do our own thing. This way we could control what went into the newsletter; we could personalise it and make it reflect our own philosophy.

The bits that we put into our own newsletter that made all the difference were the jokes. And if you think about this, it makes sense.

Be honest, if you pick up a newspaper, while you will want to read the bits you always read, don’t you always look at the cartoons as you leaf your way through? We all do it and those whose job it is to market their business products should take a serious note of this reflection on human nature.

However, most people don’t dream of doing this. For example, most professional firms send out boring, turgid newsletters describing the latest news in tax, the law or details of other technical issues. But our clients are just *not* interested in this sort of stuff. This is the reason why they engage professionals to deal with this side of things so that they don’t have to get involved. (You may have a few clients who are interested in the boffin-type

articles, but they are a small minority, so if you want to impress them, single them out and send them a letter with the clever stuff incorporated into it. By doing this, you avoid boring the masses.)

So be light-hearted. Show that you are human. Let your customers know that although you do a serious job of work, you do have a sense of humour. We keep a book of jokes in our reception for clients to read and it's the book they read the most!

However, the jokes must not be lewd and if they are poking fun at anyone, they should be ridiculing your own profession and not another one – so you can't be accused of taking unfair potshots at others.

For my part, I tend to put things into our newsletter that I come across between editions and which amuse me. If I have giggled at something, the chances are my clients will also enjoy the laugh. Why not buy some cartoons and hang them in reception? You'll be delighted at how much visitors remark on them.

30 Take one day off during your working week

This may seem a perverse suggestion but it's incredibly important. This is because we all seem to be so busy that our very busyness prevents us from taking time off and planning for the future. This lack of time to make a plan can all be changed if you know that one day in the week – and make it fixed every week, say Tuesdays – you will be free from the day-to-day stuff and can think about where you and your business is heading.

Can't be done, you say? Let me tell you how I got started:

In 2000, I told my staff that from 1 September I would no longer work Fridays in the office. From then on, it would be a day I'd spend at home. I would keep a Friday book and, as the week went by, I would list those things that I would do on the following Friday.

Now, to be on the safe side, I said that this idea would be an experiment until Christmas. That way, if it didn't work out (if my clients found that they could never get hold of me, etc.), I could return to a five-day week with no loss of faith. However, it worked a treat.

Firstly, my clients were impressed. This may be the reverse of what you would expect, but this move reflected well, rather than badly, on my business reputation. In fact, a number were rather envious of this plan and a couple actually copied me.

Secondly, it went down well with my employees. They had one day a week when I wasn't breathing down their necks and they liked it.

Thirdly, my body liked it. I could get up when I wanted on a Friday. Fridays could be used for haircuts, trips to the dentist, playing golf with my son at half-term and generally being more available to help my hard-working wife with her chores.

But, fourthly, the business benefited as I could plan ahead. Some of my Fridays were spent on work (yes, I did take some work home), but were it not for the Fridays, I would never have written our bestselling book *Tax Answers at a Glance* and this very title and I would never have had the time to enter for three national awards.

Do give it a go. It makes work and play much more fun and rewarding when you have a day that is divided between the two as you see fit – a day that belongs to you.

31 You never know where your next customer will come from

I have to tell you a story here – one against the author!

Some years ago, the front door to the office opened and in came a man wanting to sell us a burglar alarm. He had made an appointment, but I had forgotten about it and when my secretary told me he had arrived, I let out an audible moan (one this man must have heard) as if to say, 'Oh no, I hate being interrupted. Why can't people leave me alone to get on with what I have to do?'

Well, I had to see him and so I did. Now, remember, he had come to sell me a burglar alarm which I didn't want, but when he first phoned to make the appointment I thought that he might encourage me to use one. However, I didn't buy a burglar alarm. What happened was that 45 minutes later he left my office as a client of mine.

Now, did I deserve him to become a customer of mine? Not at all, if you think of the grudging way I approached meeting him in reception. But this is what happened and I learned a great lesson from this incident.

The moral of this tale is that you never know where your next customer may come from. What this means is that you must always be ‘looking your best’. You must always have a friendly face. Moodiness is absolutely forbidden. Patience and tolerance and watchfulness over your behaviour, whether in your place of business or at home, are paramount.

The dear little old lady you help – perhaps supplying her with your product for free because she cannot afford it – could well have a wealthy nephew. When he hears how kind you have been to his aunt, he may decide to buy from you on the strength of your reported kindness, when matched against his present supplier, who happens to have just been rude to him.

So while this idea isn’t really an item of specific advice, it represents a principle that you must be on your toes and behave well to everyone (customers, suppliers, tax officials and insurance salespeople, even burglar alarm salespeople) because you never know where your next customer is going to come from. As the business guru, Robert Townsend, says, ‘Marketing is *everything* you do.’

32 Have a mission statement

In the past we used to groan when it was suggested that every business should have a mission statement, but, as time has passed, this concept has become more widely accepted. Yes, I accept that it sounds like an American idea, but don’t let’s moan about and knock every idea that may come from the other side of the pond – and don’t let’s knock this one.

First of all, what is it? Well, mission statements are short, memorable and believable sentences that encapsulate what it is that your business stands for. I actually think they should be drafted in a way that the customers, as well as the employees, can read and, if they find they are true, accept.

Why have them? Because they summarise why you go to work. So often, people go to work simply to earn a crust. What I would like to see is people going to work to *live*; going to work to enjoy themselves, have fun and

spread a little happiness each day both within their organisation and, more importantly, in the direction of their customers. Having a mission statement (at least having the right mission statement) can facilitate such an atmosphere.

You will probably be fed up with me harping on about my own experiences but it's these experiences that have given me the confidence to write this book – they are, I believe, important enough to share with you. In our business, we use the mission statement 'We want to score ten out of ten in everything we do for our clients.' We don't always achieve this score but, when we do, we get thank yous ('wows') accordingly.

This mission statement, which reflects our mission in our working life, is at the head of everyone's employment contract – if people don't believe it, they don't sign up to it and don't come to work for us. It's also measurable. We can ask our customers to rate us against this target, so we can tell how well or badly we're doing. It becomes a core belief and our reason for coming to work.

I happen to think that it's a particularly good one (not that I invented it, but the moment someone said it, I knew it was a winner) and you are welcome to use/plagiarise it.

But perhaps you can see that having a slogan like this provides a happy focus for everything you do at work, is easily remembered and, to counteract the criticisms of the moaners I mentioned at the start of this point, having a mission statement is actually rather a good idea.

33 Work out what it is that you really sell

This is one of those points I have included in this book that I would love to complete by telling you what I think you should do, but, as you will see, only you will be able to work this one out.

The classic explanation of what I'm saying is the one regarding electric drills. When we go into a hardware store and buy a drill, the drill is *not* what we really want. We want the hole that we're going to make with the drill. The drill itself is the means to an end, but the 'why' of why we're buying it is the end product.

Now, to arrive at what you are really selling, you have to think outside the box. You have to defocus your thoughts and contemplate what your product provides for your customers.

It could be something almost negative. As an accountant, just about the only time we know we have a problem on our hands is when a customer is worried (when the taxman is getting at him, or his Tax Return is late, or we have taken too long in preparing his accounts). So we have to ensure that these problems never crop up or if they do, we take the sting out of the situation. As my business partner, Tim Smith, says, 'We are in the business of selling peace of mind' and if we fail to deliver *this* to our customers, we would be failing in our job.

Can you see beyond your brochure and work out what your customers really want? If you can, then not only should all your marketing be directed at this target, but also you may be able to put the price up. If you are selling something that is very similar to your competitors' products but you pitch your marketing in such a way that your product actually appears to do the job better (it does or guarantees something that your rivals' don't appear to sell or provide), you will find that customers prefer your goods and will be prepared to pay more for them.

As I say, it's impossible for me to refer to your particular sector, especially when I don't know you, but why not ask your customers or employees, or even your competitors, and search for something that will really hit the button – and tell the world the unique thing that you sell.

Word will soon spread.

34 Ask your employees what they think

This is so important – yet it took me years to spot.

Your employees probably have a better view of your business than you do. This may surprise you but it's true. It's true because they are not you. I assume it was you who started this business or if you didn't, you are now running it and so the business, whether you like it or not, is an extension of your personality. Its philosophies will be yours and while we may not understand this fully, we can never stand outside our own self or the way we practise our philosophies. Others, and especially employees, have a

much better understanding of this because they can actually see you in action. They can observe you and your business better than you can.

Customers obviously have the best vantage point when it comes to assessing a business and indeed they have the only viewpoint that matters because, on their assessment of what they see, they will decide whether or not to buy. However, employees have a view that is nearly as good as the customers'.

I decided to ask my employees for their opinions on the business as a whole and on its future direction, and suggested that we should spend an afternoon at a neutral venue to discuss an agenda that they would help create.

How did they play a part in creating the agenda? Well, I circulated a nine-point questionnaire for them to complete before we assembled. Here are some of the questions I asked:

1. What's the best part of your job?
2. What's the worst part of your job?
3. How long would you like to work in this business?
4. What ambitions do you have in this firm?
5. What work do you like doing?
6. What do you not like doing?
7. What would you like to be doing?
8. What changes do you think we should make to the way the business is run?
9. What further training would you like?

I collected the answers together and amalgamated them onto one sheet of paper, then we went through the answers at a meeting with our employees one by one.

It made a profound difference to the whole direction of the business. In fact, it resulted in us moving premises, which was a good idea, but it also made staff realise that their contribution was valued and respected. It also made me realise just how much those who worked in the business cared about the business and wanted to see it prosper.

35 Avoid small print

(I have a feeling that the title of this point is a euphemism for ‘avoid lawyers’!)

This is such an obvious point and yet so many businesses spend lots of time and money creating the small print that they believe will protect them, but this creates deep mistrust on the part of the customer.

To create an air of credibility when making a deal with a customer, do emphasise that you want to be fair to both parties. Once the customer has paid you, stress how well you will be looking after him and the benefits he will be receiving. This is how to get customers to love you. The more these benefits gets piled on top of your clients, the sooner they will forget what they have paid you and will consider your prices to be a great deal.

However, if you start by threatening your customers with interest and legal action in your small print, why should they ever buy anything from you?

So if you have a customer service agreement with pages of legalese and impenetrable small print, tear it all up and start again.

36 An example of how to avoid unfriendly small print

The following example shows you how my accountancy firm treats our clients when it comes to their annual Tax Return service. All the small print is beneficial to the customer and not to their detriment.

INVOICE No: 2009/0125

Fee for our services in connection with your 2009 Tax Return:	£165.00
VAT @ 17.5%:	<u>£28.88</u>
Total due by 31 May 2010:	£193.88

The way our annual Tax Return service works is as follows: if you would kindly settle this invoice by 31 May 2010 and send us your

Tax Return papers by 30 June 2010, in return we will:

- complete your 2010 Tax Return and send it to you for review, signing and for it to be returned to us;
- tell you how much tax you will have to pay when we send you your Tax Return;
- file your Tax Return electronically and let you know as soon as we receive acknowledgement from HM Revenue & Customs that it has been processed (so you need not even begin to worry about automatic penalties);
- send you a payslip for submitting with your tax cheque, should you require one;
- chase you if you don't get on with it (the chasing will begin on 1 July);
- send you copies of all our newsletters during the year (including the fastest Budget newsletter there is!);
- for a one-off payment, look after all of this for you for a period of 12 months up to 30 April 2011.

In addition:

If HM Revenue & Customs enquire into your Tax Return, so long as you have sent us your papers on time, we guarantee that you will not pay a penny for our fees in this connection. In our experience, enquiries normally average £1,000 in accountancy fees but, for you, there will be no charge.

You can correspond with us by Freepost and pay by credit card or Standing Order.

You can enjoy the free use of one of our Taxafiles (your own personal Tax Return organiser).

You can telephone, write, email or fax us at any stage about your Tax Return and there are no extra charges. This is an all-inclusive fee.

Because the Tax Return work is handled by team members whom we both train and value, in many cases the letter accompanying the Tax Return will be signed by the person who carried out the work.

In other words, we are all at your service.

This price does not include accounts preparation, other professional work not directly connected to the Tax Return nor work by an outside specialist adviser (should this be required). We also reserve the right to charge extra for any major Capital Gains Tax work, should this also be required, but we would only do so if you agreed that an extra charge was appropriate.

We don't believe that we have put off our customers with our small print.

37 Make sure that your signs don't put off your customers

One of the most irritating signs one can see when driving into a professional firm's car park is 'parking space reserved for senior partner'. Equally off-putting is 'keep off the grass' and that simply awful one, 'cars and contents left entirely at owner's risk'.

Why are the people who put these signs there so insensitive? They hate these signs when they see them on other people's premises, yet they put them up on their own and it's a real no-no.

When I was looking for new office premises and was with the landlord visiting the suite that we eventually decided to rent, he said to me, 'There are three parking spaces right outside your front door.' My immediate response was 'Good. They will be for our clients.' He said my reaction reflected his own customer service philosophy and we became firm friends from that moment.

In fact, later he put up a sign reserving the parking spaces for our firm. This created a bit of a problem for me – he had put the signs up to stop people parking there from other firms, but the signs read as if the parking spaces were reserved for the partners. So we altered the signs to say that they were for *visitors* to our firm.

You do need signs – to tell first-time visitors where you work – but these signs must be customer-friendly and not something your lawyer has invented to save your backside if there's a problem.

There are two golf courses near Brecon in Wales that are within three miles of each other. At one, as you arrive, you will see over ten signs that fall within this category and they all start with 'don't'. They are a real turn-off. At the other, the first sign you see is 'welcome'.

Which golf course would you rather visit?

38 Create an organisation chart

Filling in one of these will tell you if you have a business. If you have a number of different names for those who fulfil the different roles, you know you have a business. If your name fills every box, then you should start employing others to help you create a business because at present you simply have a job. Please refer to the chart on the following pages.

39 Have a vision statement

A vision statement is a short (no more than one page) statement of what you want your business to look like in (say) five years' time.

Here is a typical template for you to develop in your own way. I've added some suggested words to fill the blanks:

Working Vision Statement

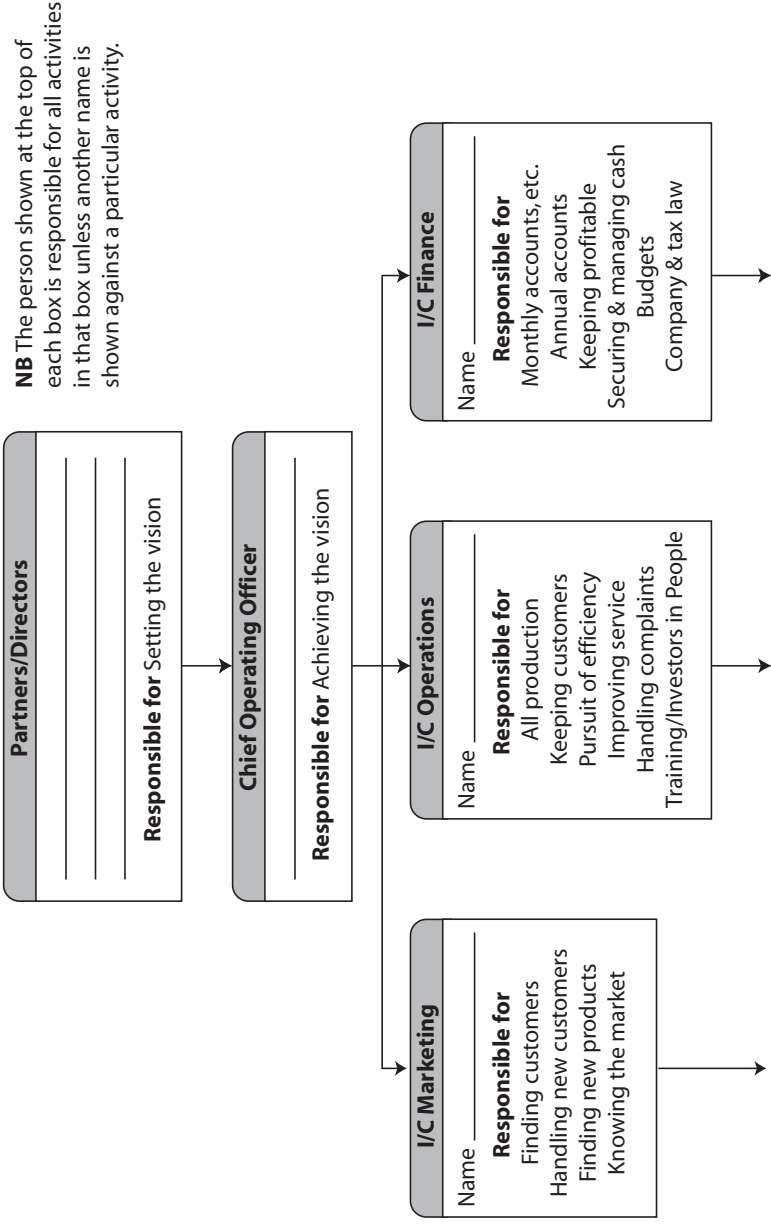
This firm has as its sole commercial purpose the objective of _____.

It will be acknowledged as the _____ best _____ in its industry and region.

Team members will be _____ proud _____ to be part of the firm and will benefit from _____ above _____ average compensation, a _____ happy _____ working environment, _____ constant _____ opportunity for professional advancement and personal growth and _____ a close _____ involvement in the decision-making process within the firm.

There will be a _____ high _____ level of trust and mutual respect amongst all team members, owners and clients.

Organisation Chart for _____



NB The person shown at the top of each box is responsible for all activities in that box unless another name is shown against a particular activity.

Each person _____ will _____ understand and subscribe to the firm's mission and will _____ regularly _____ assist in its accomplishment.

The owners of the firm will _____ always _____ place the welfare of the firm and that of its clients above their own self-interests. However, it will always be understood that the owners can expect to receive fair compensation reflecting the value of their contribution and the capital they have invested.

The firm will be innovative in its service delivery and will be guided by its principal purpose of _____ always wanting to excel _____.

The service it offers will be clearly defined, highly structured and priced in accordance to the value it represents to its clients.

40 Think 'value added'

We all tend to think that price is the driving force behind most people's purchases and that we have to be the cheapest if we're to please our customers, but as I said previously, this is a fallacy.

Yes, agreed, none of us like paying more than we want to, but, at the same time, we all like the extras we get when we buy something. How often have we, or indeed our friends, said how great it is that a particular product has come with an extra component?

When I bought a car from a particular manufacturer for the first time, I was amazed at all the extras that came with it. Indeed, it took my son, then aged 11, and me, a new customer, three months to discover all the hidden extras that the manufacturer had developed (things such as seat heaters, cup holders, a pocket stitched to the front of the driver's seat to put bits and pieces in, etc.). My car is a good example of how these thoughtful additions are the things that make all the difference and it's on these that we should be concentrating when we plan our customer service strategy.

If we stick with the car analogy, most if not all cars get you from A to B, but if you buy a car and find that it also cossets you while it performs its main function, doesn't that draw you towards it compared to the other makes you know less well? The reason for this attraction is the value added extras.