

FACILITATING STRATEGIC CHANGE THROUGH STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Charles Stanley & Co. Ltd is one of the leading investment management companies in UK. Towards the end of 2014, Paul Abberley was appointed as the new CEO of the company.

We talked to Paul to find out why improved staff engagement was key to adopting a new strategic direction for the company, and how Relume helped to deliver this.

GETTING YOUR WHOLE ORGANISATION TO ADOPT A NEW STRATEGIC MODEL MUST HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT? WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES THAT YOU FACED?

When I came into the CEO role, Charles Stanley was trying to do 'more of the same' as it had been doing for years. However, we had got to a point where continuing along this path was just not going to take the company where it needed to go. Our key challenges were therefore:

“When you implement a new strategic direction – if your staff are not engaged – then you will never deliver that strategy – so the level of their engagement becomes critical (not a ‘nice to have’)”.



Developing an agile culture

The firm needed to be nimble to deliver a new strategy. It was also critical that the company adopted a new culture. Charles Stanley had not gone through quick strategic change before, any previous change had only been incremental and evolutionary.

Re-energising staff engagement

We had around 1000 staff, who were not engaged in the sense of being mobilised and ready to implement a new strategy. Most of them were perfectly happy in their jobs and working for Charles Stanley, but they only tended to be involved in a 'business as usual' mode.

We needed an entirely different level of engagement if we were going to be successful in implementing strategic change. When you implement a new strategic direction – if the staff are not engaged, then you will never deliver. I realised that the level of staff engagement was a 'must have' and not a 'nice to have' if we were going to successfully move the company in the new direction.

“Relume listened to what it was that I wanted to do and they delivered an approach and content that we simply would not have been able to do ourselves”.

YOU SELECTED RELUME TO HELP YOU ENGAGE WITH YOUR STAFF. WHY THEM?

We chose Relume because I had worked with them in the past and had been extremely impressed with what they had delivered. I felt that in terms of what I was looking to develop at Charles Stanley, Relume had already demonstrated their ability to deliver similar improvement.

And so we engaged Relume to help deliver improvements in the effectiveness of the Executive Committee and the Operating Board, both of which had been recently restructured; and in engaging staff more widely.

“This was different to previous conferences, as we wanted it to be authentic and give people permission to speak out if they did not like something and if they were not sure about something”.



WHAT DID RELUME DO TO IMPROVE STAFF ENGAGEMENT AND THE ADOPTION OF THE NEW STRATEGY?

We worked with Relume to design a couple of conferences, each covering approximately 300 staff. Relume worked very hard on the design and delivery of these events; producing material that outlined the new strategy so that staff were able to understand what it was about prior to attending the conference.

One radical thing they persuaded us to do was, rather than tell people to attend the conference –we simply notified people about the conference and let them decide whether they wished to attend or not. We also asked people to let us know if they were interested in hosting one of the staff tables during the event.

They also devised a new format for the conference. Previously, we had adopted a format of podium presentation delivery from the Directors. Relume wanted to do something more radical and designed the event so that it was much more participatory. There were still a few talks from the podium, but people were put into groups and made to move around; taking part in exercises and discussions.

Relume acted as the 'MC' of the conference. They introduced the event, set the tone and gave people permission to speak out if they did not agree or understand something. Staff were challenged to think about how they were going to deliver the strategy. They were asked to define roadblocks that might slow down the adoption of the new strategy and also define the enablers that would allow them to implement the strategy quickly.

“The conference produced very good feedback and also produced some very good follow-up work and engagement”.

DO YOU THINK THAT THE INTERVENTION WORKED?

The conference produced really good feedback and also produced some very good follow-up work and engagement. The thing that really surprised people was that the company was willing to take risks. For example, letting staff decide if they want to attend or not and putting them in charge of deciding how to implement the strategy.

Relume produced a much more authentic event than we had ever run before. When they told staff that we were genuinely interested in their feedback, because of the way we had set up the conference – this made that statement authentic in their eyes.

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The key outcomes of the intervention were:

- People did nominate themselves to come along to the events. In fact, each event was heavily over-subscribed. The demand to host a table was so great that we ended up having two people host each table
- People wanted to find out about the strategy and from a complete cross-section of departments, and in different functions and levels of seniority
- It was not a controlled and choreographed conference, so staff found the messages far more authentic
- People felt empowered to be themselves and speak up about things they did not understand or disagreed about

These events kicked off the staff engagement stage of the new strategy which has been extremely successful.

WHAT BENEFIT HAS CHARLES STANLEY ENJOYED AS A RESULT OF INVOLVEMENT FROM RELUME?

It is too early to say whether the strategy has been successfully implemented, as this will take another 2-3 years. However, the early signs are very good. Staff are doing great work and they have put their hands up to get involved in work streams that are not their day jobs.

Staff are working effectively with others outside their own areas of competency. The results of these interventions show great promise.