

Managing expectations



If the branch manager is the heartbeat of our industry, is it time that we help them with a health check and provide them with the support that they clearly need before it is too late? Kevin Parr, Managing Director of the PGS Team, outlines his concerns.

Having worked within the merchant sector for nearly 20 years on talent and leadership development, I have never underestimated the key role that branch managers play in the pressure cooker environment of a builders' merchant depot.

They manage everything from operations, logistics, transport, Health and Safety, financials, point of sale, merchandising, yard stock, product knowledge, HR and customer service, and in most cases are head of sales and the key face of the business with customers. Is it any wonder that they have very little time to work on their leadership, improving their performance, time management and actually create some thinking time and quality personal time with their people?

Whilst speaking in a leadership session at the BMF Branch Managers Forum — one of the very few high quality opportunities that have been created out there to help provide tangible support for them — I was astonished at just how rapidly we are running out of time to support these people in one of the most important roles in the industry.

“Are branch managers really getting the support that they need when they are under increasing pressure to manage the challenging business dynamics of the world in which we are working?”

I know there will be exceptions to the rule but I am tired of hearing people telling me that they “look after their people”, that “we are a people industry” and it is “all about the people”. Really? Are they *really* getting the support that they need when they are under increasing pressure to manage the challenging business dynamics of the world in which we are working?

Some are running multi-million pound depots that in other business sectors would have a significantly more robust and cohesive support structure around them, and others are managing smaller operations where they do everything from driving fork lifts and delivery vehicles to serving customers on the trade counter.

Quite simply, they have no time to think, no time to coach their people or their teams; they are making decisions under pressure, reactive not pro-active, totally absorbed with working in the business — and never on the business.

Sales are up, profits are up — but the heart rate is up too. Managers are trying to cram 12 hours into eight every day, and in many cases six days a week just to keep up with the demand. So, where are the facts to support this?

We had a really good cross section of branch managers in the audience at the BMF Forum and these are the answers they gave when I asked the following questions:

BMF Branch Managers Forum

■ As referenced in the main article, the next BMF Branch Managers Forum takes place at the BMF's Head Office in Coventry from **March 22 & 23 March 2022**. Possibly the only series of events on the merchant calendar to bring together branch managers (and ABMs) from multiple companies across the sector, the event provides a comprehensive programme designed to help delegates run their depots more effectively and improve performance across the board.

Tailored to the key job role branch managers perform, the sessions cover a variety of vital operational topics including health & safety, digital marketing, employment law, margin maximisation, stock management, environmental efficiency and leadership. It also provides a great vehicle for managers to network and build up their industry contacts with colleagues, peers, suppliers and BMF staff.

John Newcomb, BMF Chief Executive, said: “Branch managers are the lynchpin of the industry and this forum is designed specifically for them. We are lining up a fantastic range of speakers to stimulate new thinking and galvanise action when delegates return to their branches.”

To find out more about the Branch Managers Forum or any aspect of the BMF's training programme, contact Paige Godsell, Training Co-ordinator at paige.godsell@bmf.org.uk or call her on 02476 854989.



- **Are you pro-active or reactive?** 100% responded reactive.
- **When was the last time you created yourself an hour to just sit and think about improving performance?** 100% said 'never' in the last six months.
- **When was the last time you had a team meeting with everyone there?** 100% said 'never' in the last six months.
- **When was the last time you had a personal chat, a coffee or a catch up with each of your team one to one?** 99% said they never get the time to do this.

Just how much support are these people really getting? Who is helping them to create time to think?

We keep hearing about the importance of talking to people and listening to people, but whilst there is a genuine effort to create awareness around the mental health piece at the top level, is this really happening in the day-to-day reality of running a depot?

The reality I see is that they have no time to think, no time to really talk, no

time to step back and evaluate. And, it appears, no time to change.

We need to help them before it is too late and invest in protecting the people in this vital role. If prevention is better than cure then there are interventions, and support out there such as the BMF Branch Managers Forums and the specialised training that they provide (**see panel**). In addition, we are not alone in the support and coaching that we provide at PGS Team and we can pledge a free consultation and our continued support to the industry forums.

There are a number of alternatives to choose from to support your best talent but whatever you do, please do act before we lose our best people — and the clock is ticking.

■ **Amongst its many services, The PGS Team provides leadership evaluation and assessment programmes, business simulations and individual and team coaching. For more information, enter the shortcode www.rdr.link/mae006**