

COLUMNIST



Andrew Thornton

Creating our manifesto

Sitting down with your team to find out what matters most to them is essential in formulating a good culture

A few months back, I shared our purpose at Thornton's Budgens – 'We are the community supermarket that really cares about people and planet'.

It became the core of everything we did from then on and defined how we lived in the world. I have no doubt that without that purpose, we never could have implemented our plastic-free campaign – something that had a huge impact across the whole grocery industry.

At the same time as creating our purpose, we developed a set of values. However, unlike the purpose (which was collectively developed), the values were mostly produced by an outside consultant with my input – I never really connected with them, so it's hardly surprising they had little impact in the rest of the business.

In 2018, I saw this lack of a defined and agreed set of 'ways of

being' that glued us all together was holding us back, so we set out to co-create these as a team.

One key part of the process was that I wanted to involve all full-time team members (about 40 people) and the key part-timers in some way. I asked my 'Heart in Business' colleagues, Mark and Vanessa, to facilitate the process, as it was crucial for me to be a participant rather than a leader.

A cross-section of about 10 people from the Thornton's Budgens team joined us and we set out to create what would later be called our manifesto. Phrases and words such as 'letting go', 'trust', 'daring' and 'authentic' started to flow from the team. As we discussed this, Vanessa visually captured our feelings and desires – helping us to get even clearer on what we meant.

It was clear early on that the word 'values' didn't sit comfortably with the team (see box



The picture of 'our ways of being' that Vanessa painted with us

“We brought these heartsets to life by modelling them as leaders

below) and someone suggested 'mindsets', which quickly led to 'heartsets' – and this immediately stuck.

Over a period of two months, and with numerous small group sessions, our manifesto emerged. In one session, about 10 people helped to write the heartsets. The style of writing some as 'I' and some as 'we' emerged, and there was debate on each one and whether it should be an 'I heartset' or a 'we heartset'. One person had a strong issue with a proposed heartset, so it was worked on and developed until everyone felt comfortable with it. These heartsets were a core part of this manifesto (which I will share more of in later articles).

So, let's look at the six heartsets we created: 1. I listen and learn. 2. I believe in myself. 3. I am mindful. 4. We acknowledge and appreciate. 5. We can do it. 6. We are all respected.

At the end of the process, all the key people in the store felt they'd been involved in this process and had ownership of the heartsets – step 1.

Over the coming months and years, we continued bringing these heartsets to life by modelling them as leaders whenever we had the opportunity, through our behaviour and through our habits. I will explain more on this over the next two months.

Andrew Thornton is the former owner of Thornton's Budgens, founder of Heart in Business and author of 'Putting the Heart Back into Business', scheduled for release on 21 April 2022

★ Ways of being

+ WHEN I FIRST looked up the meaning of this, I came up with the following definition – 'ways of being reflect what's going on for you internally (your mental and emotional state, your thoughts and how you feel in your body)'. Adapting this for companies means it's a description of what is going on in the company and its collective emotional state. The most common business way of addressing this is through a set of values. My research for our book (which comes out later this month) showed how important the production of a set of values that connected people was to the turnaround of both Tesco under Dave Lewis, and of Sainsbury's under Justin King. Yet values as a term has been quite abused by companies that say one thing and act differently. I love heartsets, but it does not matter what you call them – you just need to have a set of them.