

COLUMNIST



Andrew Thornton

Modelling behaviour

Matching your actions to a clearly defined set of values should be the cornerstone of any well-run business

When I interviewed former Tesco CEO Dave Lewis for our book, he said: “When people live one life and talk about something else, don’t be surprised when the audience notices the words and music don’t add up.” This struck me as very profound. He added: “You can’t talk yourself out of something you’ve behaved yourself into.”

Wonderful. I can just picture a certain well-known politician trying to persuade us he “hadn’t realised” he’d attended a party, despite various photos showing him at something that looks very much like a party.

How often have you gone into a store and seen the words and music not adding up? I have talked in previous columns about the importance of having a clear purpose and a set of values – what we call ‘heartsets’ – that define who you are.

With this in place, the leader-

ship team has to model them with 100% consistency, otherwise there is no chance your team will take a blind bit of notice.

This is much harder than coming up with the words, and will be the making or breaking of your business.

In 2014, part of the reason Tesco got into trouble in the run-up to the Serious Fraud Squad being called in was that while the words suggested the customer was king, the actions were all about hitting the numbers.

In this extreme example, the pressure to hit numbers led to people effectively starting to fiddle the numbers.

At Thornton’s Budgens, one of our habits that we put in place to help us deliver our purpose – ‘We are the community supermarket that really cares about people and planet’ – was giving appreciation daily. The more traditional approach to retail was parodied by a comedy sketch I saw years ago in



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which a store manager played by John Cleese was marching around a DIY shop with a clipboard pointing out rather rudely everything he saw wrong – and his minions were running around trying to sort things, bowing, scraping and apologising to him.

To model our habit, I make a point of wandering around our store looking for things to appreciate and compliment people upon, and hold back things that need attention for another day. When doing this, it is really important to use what I call descriptive praise.

If you tell someone display looks “great”, it’s a bit meaningless, and might come across as insincere, especially if people are not used to their boss being positive. However, telling them you “love how abundant and fresh the fish counter looks”, and because of this you “want to buy the lot” is descriptive praise.

In the book, we interviewed a number of the team from the store. In his interview, Jahid said: “I value the frequent appreciation I receive, not only from Andrew, but also the other leaders.

“I believe appreciation is more valuable than money.” In these times, with the so-called ‘great resignation’ under way, I can’t think of an easier and better behaviour for leaders to model than giving appreciation daily.

Andrew Thornton is the former owner of Thornton’s Budgens, founder of Heart in Business and co-author of ‘Putting the Heart Back into Business’, available for purchase now from: heartinbusiness.org/book

★ Living self-leadership

+ **ONE OF OUR** other habits was living self-leadership, which is about becoming an expert on yourself through a commitment to honest self-reflection and the ongoing process of learning and growing from your experiences. I, and my fellow leaders, had to model this by being willing to publicly self-reflect on what we had learned in particular situations, especially when things went wrong – taking responsibility for my part – rather than trying to blame others – and by showing how I had learned from what happened. In the book, one of my other colleagues, Shanthy, said of me: “One really good thing about him is that he can admit to making a mistake.” She said that because I had modelled taking responsibility, not because I said we should all take responsibility.