

BUSINESS

Picking winners

Gavin Brooks, an area manager at food retail specialist Konditor & Cook, describes joining a company that has just engaged a management consultancy – and its impact on his career

We all go through our lives trying to pick winners, continuously striving for something better. These decisions are often driven by an emotional force.

As a child, I picked my favourite toys based on how they looked, how they made me feel and the perception I was fed from my friends; we pick our favourite football teams based on who is top of the league and who our peers are supporting; we pick our educational needs through the subject we feel comfortable with and then, as we get older, we pick the horse we think will win the Grand National just because we like the name.

This emotional force can also have a huge impact on our job decisions.

As I became more involved, I became competitive. I wanted the highest grossing bar, I wanted to smash budget and most of all I wanted this as a progressive career. I wanted to succeed; the only hindrance was the lack of scope to develop and my employers' lack of infrastructure to enable my drive to succeed.

I had to re-evaluate my position as to whether or not to make a move to an employer who would give me the tools to do the job that I knew I could do. The ever-changing variables of the hospitality industry kept me engaged. The good thing was that I was 100% sure the hospitality industry was for me. So I had picked my first winner.

I liked solving problems and achieving group goals, but just needed my employer's horse to have been built well enough to help me drive myself and my team to our destination, which was the highest grossing revenue possible, smashed budgets and, most of all, a progressive career.

Next for the hard part; how to pick the company? I had worked for a big national brand before and I liked the security and structure, but the sticking point was that I often found it limiting when it came to expressing my creativity. I'd also worked for independents before, and they were fun; they were free thinking, but had no structure. Emotion is a key driver, but it needs to be guided.

So I wanted to find a free-thinking creative company, small enough for me to develop, but with a big enough vision to establish a world-class brand and operation – easier said than done.

After rounds of interviews with visionless companies I was put in touch with the operations director of luxury food retailer Konditor & Cook.

Two hours later I was inspired. It was the most personal interview experience I'd had for several years; a meeting of minds where the ethics, quality and values mirrored mine, but, unfortunately, there was also an alarm bell. "We've just employed a management consultant." I had immediate fears of a stuffy, office-based



Harvard grad trying to gel with a business driven by passion and creativity.

My second interview was arranged with the same ops director and David, the Accenture-trained consultant who ran a firm called GBI.

What happened next changed my view and dispelled my prejudices. I was greeted warmly by a professional, who had an obvious passion for people, for product and, most of all, for gathering and delivering information within a very clear and structured time line. This person was going to take Konditor & Cook's creativity and passion and put it in a suitable vehicle to meet *their* needs and ultimately deliver success.

I had the most structured interview that I have ever had, which I learnt was an element of GBI's approach to improvement. It delved into my knowledge, compatibility, passions, ability to deliver and competences, in order to ascertain if I was right for them and if they were right for me. At the same time, I knew that if they could realistically operationalise their passions and their expectations then this was right for me.

GBI had set Konditor & Cook up with five core values, not plucked from the sky or broad themes applicable to all businesses, but based upon the owner's vision and desires.

At my crossroads I had found a company that had a great product, immense passion, creativity, long-term vision and an infrastructure

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with which to deliver it all.

The management consultancy had taken the Konditor & Cook brand and had made it the company's core value, developed and implemented the 18 performance factors to deliver it and built an infrastructure to enable all employees to develop themselves and achieve the company's goals. Finally, it had built Konditor & Cook an interview process to ensure the company selected the right people. The 18 specific performance factors were embedded into the company as a structure for all to live and work by, in order to reach Konditor & Cook's high expectations as a luxury brand.

For my own and the company's benefit, Konditor & Cook also engaged David and his GBI team to deliver a five-day induction programme for me as their new area manager. The speed, structure and quality of learning was unlike anything I've ever experienced in the industry before. After the programme, I knew the people, the processes and the areas of focus better than I would have ever expected. In short, I had my first 100-day plan and knew the infrastructures in place in order for me to succeed.

The structure implemented by GBI gave me the framework I needed to help the company deliver its amazing product internally to its staff and externally to the world.

At last I'd picked a winner, not only because I liked the name, but this time also because I knew how fast and long this horse would run.

Konditor & Cook has engaged GBI in an ongoing programme of business improvements. For more information about David Gibson or the team at GBI, please visit gibsoninfrastructures.com