

The double act

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DEREK MEDHURST AND DAVE RICHARDS STARTED WORKING FOR NATWEST IN THE 1970S, ALTHOUGH THEY DID NOT MEET UNTIL 1990. FROM THIS POINT ON THEY PROBABLY NEVER WORKED MORE THAN 25 YARDS AWAY FROM EACH OTHER. AND IT SHOWS. DEREK AND DAVE - NOW IN BUSINESS TOGETHER - ARE THE DOUBLE ACT OF THE EXCELLENCE WORLD

BY HELEN OLDFIELD



In the 1990s, Derek and Dave helped different NatWest businesses embed the Model and compile award portfolios for the UK Business Excellence Award. For the last three years at NatWest they were the 'centre of excellence': acting very much like a consultancy advising other parts of the business how to implement the Model. They supported NatWest Insurance Services, NatWest Mortgage Services, and NatWest Life in their quests for the award. Dave explains: 'We love being able to help people solve their problems. We were the 'agony uncles' of NatWest. We even had an early morning 'clinic' in the canteen where people would come and discuss their excellence issues!'

Based at head office there was some kudos afforded the role of excellence ambassadors and they were often seen as change agents. Or as Dave puts it 'corporate jesters'. Derek and Dave became well known in the organisation: 'We got so much support from within NatWest,' remembers Dave. But in 1999 it all changed. The Royal Bank of Scotland was poised to take over NatWest and redundancies were being sought at head office. Derek explains: 'We went from the award dinner where we achieved our aim of getting a NatWest winner of the UK Business Excellence Award - with most of the top people in NatWest sitting at our tables - to contemplating redundancy three weeks later.' Although there is no bitterness on the part of Derek and Dave the irony of the situation now makes them laugh.

Derek and Dave were left with a stark choice: they could look for other positions within the group or

leave and find other jobs. But neither option seemed attractive. Derek explains: 'We quickly ruled out going for another job as we couldn't envisage a job where we had the degree of the freedom we had been afforded at NatWest.' There was also another problem; they enjoyed working together with their similar personal values and their belief in the Excellence Model. There was only one alternative: to go it alone or rather together.

GOING IT TOGETHER

So on the 1 January 2000 they set up business. Known for years inside Nat West as D&D, it seemed natural to call their business D&D Excellence. They decided early on that they wanted to work with organisations that already used the Model and wanted help moving forward. Dave explains why: 'We know how challenging it can be to convince people to use it if they are not aware of its merits, we had a lot of practice. But it seemed sensible to work with those who already knew of its benefits.' It was an opportunity to put their expertise to work in other environments and it wasn't long before the work came in. Dave explains: 'The key measure for us is to do the quality of job where customers are happy to invite us back even if we have had to help them learn some hard lessons about themselves.'

Early on they received a call from EFQM to do work on the new levels for excellence scheme. They also did some work for NatWest. The double act soon proved popular and D&D have found themselves being recommended. They worked with the Small Business Service to update the Model in the Bench-

mark Index. Their detailed knowledge of excellence earned them a rather ungracious name during this assignment. Dave admits: 'We have been labelled the "Model anoraks"'. But it is their detailed knowledge and ability to apply the Model in a practical non-jargon way that has probably brought the repeat work they set out to achieve. 'It's not what you do, it's the way that you do it' says Derek.


INTO AFRICA

Probably their most personally rewarding work to date has been a training appointment in Tanzania. Derek and Dave were invited by BQC Performance Management Ltd - which had been awarded a contract to train senior officials from government agencies in the use of the Model. The Tanzanian government is undergoing a reform programme with the help of the World Bank and IMF. It is using the Model to help deliver improvements in government agencies. BQC needed two people who knew the Model well and would gel with as a good training team far from home.

It took Dave and Derek only a moment to decide that they wanted to help introduce the Model in Tanzania. The course they developed was based on assessor training and continuous improvement techniques. Derek explains: 'We were going into unknown territory, but in reality it was both tremendous fun and hard work.' Even in Africa Derek and Dave brought their own unique style to the work. They learned a few basic Swahili words for their overhead slides, and then researched Tanzanian football teams for a workshop exercise. And

they were told in feedback that their sense of humour had helped everyone overcome any potential cultural differences. 'One of the beauties was the sheer enthusiasm of the delegates for the Excellence Model,' comments Dave. 'The Tanzanians' eagerness to learn was incredibly refreshing.'

There is already impressive work going on in Tanzania using the Model. Dave and Derek invited an attendee from the Tanzanian Wildlife Service to talk about his experiences on the course. The Wildlife Service had been faced with the problem of declining wildlife numbers. Initially rangers were given targets to capture poachers. But a year later it found that wildlife numbers were still going down. The service looked again and discovered that rangers did not capture the poachers until they had killed something. The rangers were hitting their capture targets but the problem still remained. The service found that many kills were subsistence poaching so it decided to take an unusual step and view the poachers as stakeholders. It permitted local villages a certain number of kills and rangers became educators talking to villagers. Soon the wildlife numbers started to climb.

Derek and Dave keep in touch with delegates and the Tanzanian civil service has through their recommendation been given honorary membership of the BQF. They are also involved in supporting rural schools in Tanzania and do hope to go back. Being 'Model anoraks' has reaped rewards for Derek and Dave beyond their days as the agony uncles of NatWest 



DAVE RICHARDS (LEFT) AND DEREK MEDHURST (ABOVE) ARE D&D EXCELLENCE AND HAVE WORKED WITH THE EXCELLENCE MODEL SINCE 1993.

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