Shining example

Atrium brought in Vertical Sales to make sure its management structure was strong enough to drive growth and meet the needs of its succession plan.

London-based lighting solutions company Atrium is a dynamic business with big ambitions. Chairman Patrick Dormoy and his managing director son Ulysse have a succession plan in place and are preparing the company for exit within the next few years. To do this, driving further growth and strengthening their management structure is vital; potential buyers will want to see that the business is sustainable once the current owners have departed.

“The first aim was to drive and develop the capabilities of our two sales directors,” explains Ulysse Dormoy. “We recognised we needed professional help and, following a recommendation, turned to Cathy Bennett of sales consultancy Vertical Sales, and following an initial meeting we felt that she was the right fit for Atrium.”

Two’s company

When Cathy came on board in September 2012, the two sales directors were managing Atrium’s six-strong sales team between them. Going beyond performance coaching, Cathy developed a solution to help improve the structure of the business and drive future growth, based on her sense that the sales directors had two different skills sets.

A multi-faceted assessment of the two sales directors helped identify the role best suited to each individual. “On analysing the results, I recommended that rather than sharing responsibility, the two sales directors should have completely different roles,” says Cathy.

Click here to read more about the Sales Assessment [http://www.salesassessment.com]
With Atrium team agreeing with her conclusion, they decided to restructure the business around the new roles. As a result, Jeremy Fielding became the sole sales director, while Richard Corcoran took the new position of commercial director. With the roles defined and new business strategy implemented, Cathy could help Richard and Jeremy to develop the skills required for their new positions.

**Playing to your strengths**

“Jeremy is now our pure sales director looking after our team of six. He’s at the front end of the sales process, picking up the new leads and developing project specifications,” says Richard. “Meanwhile, I pick up what Jeremy and his team starts and close the deal, providing the support that our clients need further down the line. We’re both playing to our strengths.”

As for Jeremy, he’s relishing the new challenge of leading the sales team, and is benefiting from Cathy’s coaching. “I can now delegate more effectively and have better organisational skills. Cathy has taught me to analyse and prepare things in more depth. I’ve learned how to ask my team right questions in terms of what they’re doing, helping them to do a better job without taking over, guiding them to make their own decisions. This has led to the sales team evolving significantly.”

One of Richard’s tasks as Commercial Director is to get much deeper into the sales strategies and procedures. “Before working with Cathy, we didn’t go into as much detail with projects and the follow up wasn’t as thorough towards the end, which is necessary to get it over the line,” he says. “We’re now applying our skills much more more effectively and convincingly across the sales process.”

**Process focus**

Cathy’s approach of getting under the skin of the companies she works for frequently finds her identifying additional ways to improve businesses. At Atrium,
she saw the company’s sales process needed to be defined more clearly. “Top-performing businesses align their sales process with their customers’ buying process,” says Cathy. “We agreed we needed to hone this for Atrium and as a result, the company’s whole business process is now clearly defined.”

Consequently, Atrium is developing a stronger, more customer-focused approach. “We’re making sure we have the right processes in place, from the first phone call to when the customer takes the keys to their new space with all this wonderful lighting in it,” says Richard. “We’re trying to get every element of the cycle worked through and improved where possible.”

Cathy has also worked with Atrium on improving sales pipeline measurement and management, along with introducing sales forecasting.

**Building blocks in place**

Ulysee Dormoy and his newly deployed directors have seen a marked improvement in the business since the restructuring.

“The change has been very positive, with both Jeremy and Richard coming on in leaps and bounds. It has created a template for developing the whole of the sales team, too, something Cathy is going to help us with next,” says Ulysse.

This new business structure has meant that the Atrium team is working more cohesively, according to Ulysse. “This is backed by a recent example where a £110,000 project dropped to £55,000 and was brought back up to £110,000 by involving the Commercial Director and the whole team working as a unit,” he explains.

“The directors are much clearer on direction and very focused as a result. Richard, for example, has really gripped the database and is driving through improvements and usage. Consequently, client records are much more refined
and his confidence with the sales team has increased enormously. Our business mindset has changed and the organisational redesign will definitely add value.”

With the key building blocks now in place, the business is on track for fulfil its succession ambitions for a successful exit, when the time is right.

– Click here to email Vertical Sales Cathy Bennett
– Click here to find out more about Atrium [link to Atrium website]
– Click here for a Q&A with the Atrium team (links to Q&A below)

Ulysse Dormoy – Managing Director

Why did you decide to bring in a sales consultant?

Sometimes you can tell someone something as many times as you like, but when it comes from a professional trainer it’s perceived to have a greater level of value. Hence we decided to use an external consultant for training.

It’s important to find the right one, so why did you choose Cathy?

A recommendation from someone I currently work with. We had a couple of other options, but in terms of fit, Cathy seemed to suit the type of organisation we were much better than the others.

What were your initial objectives?

The aims were to help us drive and develop the capabilities of our sales managers. As it happens, we ended up doing something quite different – separating the sales directors into two different roles.

This was something we started to become aware of from both Cathy and the feeling within the business. We were aware of the natural difference between then and hence the reason for looking at the possibilities of redefining their roles.
We intentionally made certain choice to facilitate the change in roles and as a result it is working very much for the better.

We have restructured the business around these redefined roles, and the change in the case of Jeremy moving to commercial director from sales director has been very positive. Jeremy has moved forwards leaps and bounds, which I don’t think would have happened if he’d remained sales director. It’s an identification process of making the best use of people’s skills. Identifying the key skills and strengths of each of our sales directors was something that Cathy was instrumental in driving through.

What’s it has allowed us to do is consider how we take on the development of the whole of the sales team, which is something that Cathy is going to help us with now.

Since redefining the roles of the sales directors, what other areas of the business has Cathy worked on?

We have now defined the business process more clearly and are continuing on that basis. So it’s not just about developing people, it’s about Cathy helping us to develop the right processes to take the business forward over the coming years.

How do you think that you personally have gained from having Cathy in the business?

Working on the business processes has helped enormously. Plus generally speaking having someone to bounce ideas and issues off definitely helps.

What are the overall aims of the business going forward?

We want to take the business forward through some form of succession plan. We’ve identified what this succession plan is going to be and Cathy is now helping us put all the building blocks in place to achieve this, as sales is a hugely important factor. Getting the right systems and processes in place is vital.

Where do you see Cathy’s role in the business in the future?

We view Cathy very much as someone working alongside the business. We might reach as stage going forward where we feel mutually feel we have
exhausted here support, but I feel this is quite a long way off, and I’d very much like to see her as part of the team helping us to drive things forward.

**What key features of how Cathy approaches her work do you think have really stood out and have really helped drive the changes through the business?**

It’s not about any particular feature, but rather about finding the right person or company for the role, in the same way as we would choose any supplier. It’s all about getting the right match, and we feel that we have got the right person in Cathy to help us deliver our objectives – this is the key factor. The relationship must work for both sides and matching personalities is hugely important in that.

**Richard Corcoran – Commercial Director**

**What were your initial thoughts about bringing in a sales consultant to coach you?**

Very positive. We’re a growing company and the idea of maximising our expertise and the knowledge we’ve got available to use was something that Jeremy and I both look on as being good for the business and we’ve embraced it wholeheartedly since the start. It’s certainly paying dividend.

**How have you found the experience?**

The role of the sales directors is something I’ve grown into during my time at Atrium, from a more junior role. So it has very much been training on the job, so getting someone to come in and look at what do through completely independent eyes and not get caught up in the day-to-day routine has been really beneficial.

**How have you benefited personally?**

Well my job has changed for a start. Jeremy and have been carrying out similar roles within Atrium for several years, with two different teams. We managed our teams through projects from start to finish.

We carried out an assessment of our skills with Cathy’s input to identify our strengths and weaknesses and come up with a personal development plan. This
confirmed thoughts we’d had already that Jeremy’s skill and mine were quite different, but with a really good overlap. The results of the assessment were presented to the chairman and managing director, and, along with Cathy, we all agreed to changing our roles and restructuring the business around them.

Consequently, Jeremy is now our pure sales director looking after our team of six, and is at the front end of the process, picking up the new leads and developing project specifications. Meanwhile, my role is commercial director, picking up what Jeremy starts and the completing it. So Jeremy plays to his strengths in running the start of projects and they I bring in my skills in closing the deal and providing the support that our clients need further down the line.

I think we’d all agree that there has been an improvement since the change was made.

**How do your think this is helping the business, and will do in the future?**

One of my roles as commercial director is to get much deeper into the strategies and procedures we’re looking towards. This has meant there has been a lot of development in the background, and although this doesn’t necessarily lead directly to tangible results in the short team, we’re confident that it will lead to long-term success, as we are improving our foundations as an organisation.

But when it comes to projects, where before we didn’t going into as much detail and the follow up wasn’t as thorough, which is necessary towards the end of a project to get it over the line, now I can add key input in these areas and expertise that has led to some good size orders.

Certainly the skills Jeremy and I have got are now applied much more effectively and convincingly across the sales process.

**Beyond the changing roles, what else has Cathy been involved in?**

First, the same assessment that Jeremy and I were involved in will be applied across the sales team to make sure we’re getting the best from each individual. The aim this time is to identify a training programme for the team, to improve their skills base.

Cathy’s ability to be a catalyst for positive change and to get us looking at things within the business from a different perspective cannot be underestimated.

We have taken a real root and branch approach to what we do, and are developing and stronger, more focused customer approach. This is being achieved by examining the skill sets we have here, and ensuring the teams are
aligned to the best of their abilities. Plus we’re making sure we have the right processes in place, from the first phone call to the when the customer takes the keys to their new space with all this wonderful lighting in it. We’re trying to get every element of the process worked through and improved where possible.

It’s nice to be able to challenge things. It hard to take a step back and look at the business from a distance, due to the very busy day-to-day routine. Cathy has done this for us. She has also been great as a sounding board for issues and ideas. And she is always very receptive and able to come up with positive comments and ideas. I has been a really positive experience so far.

Jeremy Fielding – Sales Director

**What did you think when a sales consultant was brought in?**

We were told from the start that the purpose of bring in Vertical Sales was to develop us as better managers. As far as I was concerned, I thought that if the company was interested in investing in someone to develop its staff then it can only be a positive.

**How did you find the experience?**

Very good.

**What would you say you’ve gained from the experience personally?**

It has taught me to analyse and prepare the things I do more. I’ve also learned how to ask the right questions of the members for the team in terms of what they’re doing, while assisting them to do a better job without taking over. Helping them make their own decisions with guidance from me. Like many sales people, they ask questions and expect you to give them the answer, but it’s often better if you can guide them to find the answers themselves.

I’ve never had any management training and Cathy has been great to instigate those kind of questions to make sure I’m doing the right things in the role I’m employed to do.

**What key improvements to you think you have made to the way you work day to day?**
Although there is still lots of room for improvement, I have learned how to delegate better. Also prioritising my work and that of the team, by looking at what’s urgent and what’s not. Then guiding them to take control themselves, rather than me having to control everything.

Also in terms of preparation for the upcoming week. We now have meetings every week and this gives the team a clearer understanding of what they need to do, while communicating my expectations.

Cathy has helped to bring in key processes, creating more organisation in the way I do my job.

Summing up I now have a greater ability to delegate more effectively and better organisational skills.

**How has Cathy affected your performance?**

The sales team has evolved massively. When I joined, Richard and myself were joint sales directors. Through Cathy we embarked on a joint assessment process, where we did a self-analysis, which looked at our strengths and weaknesses. From the results of that, the company has remodelled itself to accommodate our individual, but largely contrasting, strengths.

This enables us to offer a better total solution, rather than doing the same job half-heartedly.

**How have you found this reappraisal of your skills?**

I’ve found the process really rewarding. I know that I need to spend more time communicating with Cathy when she’s not here, but I’ve enjoyed the time when she’s here to be able to air opinions. She doesn’t necessarily give the answer, but talks about the processes leading to certain solutions.

Cathy’s involvement with the MD has been very positive. He now takes a very different approach to the business. The team has noticed that and I think they attribute that to her involvement with the business more than anything else.

**What is the key to the more positive atmosphere?**

Listening and understanding from third parties. You have an opinion of yourself, whether that’s personally or professionally, and sometimes you need someone to challenge your perspective. This makes you think about the situation from a different dimension – from other people’s viewpoints. And this is what Cathy’s
involvement with the MD has done. He’s very passionate about the business, but often purely focuses on the process, and not perhaps taking into account the human side as much as he should.

**How is this process helping the business?**

Massively. We’ve intimated certainly in the discussions we’ve had with Cathy that there is a lot more training that we would like her to be involved with in terms of personal development and processes, sales technique. From the juniors to the seniors, if everyone can maintain a level of education, then we’ve all learned the same process together. We can all say we’ve had sales process training, cold calling guidance, whatever it might be. And I think it’s imperative that everyone has it.

It’s created a culture of continuous improvement and I’d like to continue that.

**What are the key characteristics about Cathy’s approach that have really resonated with you?**

It’s the way she never gives you the answer. I admire her approach because she questions you until you find the answer yourself, making people work it our for themselves.

She will challenge you and ask you why, and it really makes you think about the situation. Personally, I think she has been a real positive for the business and I hope she continues to work with us.