

Great Guns Marketing retains the family feel despite rapid expansion

Managing director exploits the power of listening to employees

In 1998 Liz Jackson founded her telemarketing company, located in the lounge of her rented flat in Basingstoke, England, with a £1,000 grant and £4,000 loan from The Prince's Trust.

Soon after, she lost her eyesight because of a degenerative eye disorder. Yet despite this challenge, her company Great Guns Marketing continues to expand rapidly, with a growing list of prestigious clients.

One thing she truly believes is that without her employees, Great Guns would not be the success it is today, and in order to continue to maintain growth in the highly competitive telemarketing market, looking after her staff is essential.

Listen to people

"One of the best pieces of business advice I received came from my boss prior to starting my company," said Liz Jackson. "He told me that I have two ears and one mouth and should always use them in that ratio."

She believes that she is very much "work in progress" as far as that is concerned, but thinks her ex-boss's advice underlines that time is such a valuable commodity in today's fast-moving business world.

However, she believes that every problem also carries an opportunity. "When I give my employees my time, I stop, sit down, and really listen to them – really listen to them," she emphasized. "This is appreciated and makes them feel valued. I listen to news of their family, their pressures and concerns, or ideas and complaints, but most importantly, I listen to their aspirations and desires."

"You really can't expect people to buy into your visions and dreams if you don't buy into theirs first. It is all part of building the Great Guns Marketing family, creating and developing a happy atmosphere in a thriving, busy, business environment."

"It is important for Great Guns to feel like a family because everyone is committed to family – they celebrate success together, and also rally around during the more difficult times. The stronger the family feel in a company, the more the employees want the business to succeed and the greater the team spirit."

She believes that if people feel part of something worthwhile and have ownership of the well being of the company, they want it to succeed and it gives them a sense of achievement and happiness.



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She sees the biggest challenge for Great Guns as being to retain the family feel as the company grows. This will be done by always listening, no matter how big the company becomes – having the time to sit down with any member of staff will remain essential.

Family fun days out and initiatives in the office help to keep a high enjoyment level throughout the day. Company results and meetings are also important to keep all employees informed about the current performance of the business, which encourages ownership and motivates them in their work.

Liz Jackson recognizes that she heads a service company, so the “product” it sells is its people. The better the people perform, the better the product and the more impressed customers are.

As managing director, she believes that her job is not to sit at the top of the organization and take the view that everyone is there to serve her. Instead, she sees that part of her role is to ensure that all of her people are happy at their jobs and have all of the tools and expertise necessary to do a great job. This enables them to have the customer at the front of their minds, creating a successful business.

Liz Jackson regularly listens to the audio version of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, by Dale Carnegie. “It is an old one but full of timeless and highly relevant wisdom,” she commented. “One of the great metaphors in the book is where the author asks if you have noticed how the sea got so big and powerful? It is because it sits lower than the rivers and streams. The author concludes that there is real power in humility.”

In business to win and retain customers

She believes that, if there is a secret to the success of her business, it is the relentless focus on winning and retaining clients. In 2004, the company won the Customer Focus Award in the National Business Awards program, referred to by prime minister Gordon Brown as the “business Oscars”.

Getting and staying close to customers

One way in which Great Guns keeps its focus on the customer is through its program of opening telemarketing centers in locations across the UK and Ireland. This places the company’s telemarketers in their customers’ back yards and helps to promote a close working relationship between employee and client.

“We stick to our knitting,” said Liz Jackson. “We only take on business-to-business projects where the client is looking for us to make sales appointments with managers and directors in their target markets.”

Staff incentives

She believes that incentives are a great method to motivate employees to achieve results for clients. Apart from financial incentives, such as commission, the company also offers a range of “fun” rewards, including raffles, bottles of wine, and even a ride in a hot-air balloon.



Commission paid is based on results achieved for customers. However, a greater sum is awarded when the customer signs a renewal, and business is retained. Setting commission against results drives a client-orientated attitude among employees.

Great Guns Marketing's vision

The vision for Great Guns Marketing is to become the UK's best telemarketing company. The company measures itself on customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, profit and growth.

"These measures are really important to us. They are always listed in priority order and that is crucial, too," enthused Liz Jackson. Customer satisfaction always comes first for her, closely followed by employee satisfaction. "You need happy employees if you want happy customers," she said.

Profit is third, as it is the lifeblood of any business but cannot be consistently achieved in the long-term without the first two elements. Finally, growth is an important measure. She is convinced that businesses, like flowers, either grow or die. Hence growth comes last, but certainly not least in the list, as it cannot be achieved without the others.

The longer term

The long-term objective for Great Guns is to continue its expansion. Liz Jackson expects to have around 16 telemarketing centers across the UK, serving all the major business centers. With eight current telemarketing centers, the company is half way towards achieving its objective. Ambitious plans also exist to expand into continental Europe and North America. These will be rolled out once the UK development is complete.

"I love the world of business and Great Guns Marketing is the best thing I have ever done," Liz Jackson concluded. "I launched the company when I was 25 and I am only 34 now, with a lot of working life yet to live. I plan to continue to develop the company and push the boundaries. It is an exciting time for the company, employees and myself, and I look forward to the challenges and opportunities the future holds."

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Note

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