

The science of business

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As climate change becomes more and more understood in terms of the detrimental effects to humanity, a knock-on for businesses in the sector can be one of opportunity challenges.



Dr Martin Van Nierop

“Traditionally Gondwana Environmental Solutions was a service-only company. Just before engaging with a business coach, we had acquired a product and equipment supplier (ERO Electronics) to provide us with a full turnkey solution for our existing database, with future plans to expand Gondwana’s offering to the ERO database,” says Dr Martin van Nierop, managing director of Gondwana.

The group showed a huge loss due to the acquisition, despite having had an acceptable financial year in the Gondwana Environmental division.

“We have realised that we were thinking of the business from a science perspective as we’re all trained as scientists,” says Martin. “We thought that we had a sales problem, but we didn’t, we had a systems, process and alignment problem. We realised that we needed external assistance to look at

our business with fresh and objective eyes.”

The business coach that was brought into the business is Brendon Saunders, a Johannesburg-based ActionCOACH. “Initially, management felt that they had a sales problem, but I was interested in delving deeper and uncovering team challenges and short-term cashflow wins that would lead to long-term system changes and operations,” says Saunders. “I started with implementing the 5-ways financial profits formula to understand their pipeline. This was met with massive resistance from all management as it removed the ability to ‘hide’ from their results... good or bad! The feedback was that the 5-ways didn’t apply to their business.”

“There was a mindset shift that had to be made,” says Martin. “We all had to start being accountable for our own parts and to build a vision that would lead to the long-term sustainability of the company. We looked at overhauling current systems and building standard operating procedures (SOPs) for each department to create the company manual. This will always be a work in progress, updated regularly.”

The initial results showed a 100% growth in revenue in 2020. Thereafter, the group has been in a process of restructuring and rebuilding after the effects of Covid.

Senior management has been very involved in the business restructuring process, with a company culture and team dynamics shift to fit the new vision for the company. This led to some people leaving the company and others that are of a more natural fit joining it.

“Brendon has helped us to focus on the business aspect of the business and talk about all the issues that’s important to keep a business going. By doing the coaching, the value you get back from being coached far exceeds the value of what you’re paying out as an expense,” says Martin. “It has been an interesting journey to start understanding that someone from the outside, with years of business experience, and no scientific background, is able to understand a business such as ours, and to grow it.”

The company is set to break records for this coming financial year with all the system and process work being done.

“Martin has been coaching with me for three years with different levels of success across many aspects of the business,” says Saunders. “Success has also come in different ways including a better understanding of the mechanics of business, knowing their numbers, enhancing leadership skills, better team management, building and understanding the company vision and plotting the course to achieve that vision.

“Business is a science, but a practical one,” says Saunders. “If top management are able to look at the business through different filters, and apply what is recommended, it is possible for most businesses to reach a point of not only sustainability, but also the ability to remove the owners from day-to-day operations and assist them to work on and not in the business.”

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