

# Tools of the trade



Ideas, insights and inspiration  
on how to be a good leader and  
build a successful business

BY PAUL McDEVITT



---

# Trusted advice to help power your business

This collection of industry insights has been specially curated to help Members grow their business and become better leaders. Originally appearing in *cabletalk* magazine, the expert advice has been written by Paul McDevitt, Managing Director of McDevitt & Co, an experienced business consultancy that helps to inspire people, improve productivity and increase profits in the construction industry.

Find out more and contact him at [www.mcdevitt.co](http://www.mcdevitt.co)





# Contents

**04**

The qualities that count in a leader

**06**

Ten tips on creating a top team

**08**

How to keep your people engaged

**10**

The best ways to train and retain

**12**

Why it's vital to have the right values

**16**

Making your people the priority

**18**

How to have those tricky conversations

**20**

The many merits of a mentor

**22**

Reducing the risk of staff burn-out

**24**

Achieving maximum motivation

**26**

Keeping all your people connected

**30**

Ten top tips to foster growth

**34**

How to choose the right path for you

**36**

Turning net zero goals into reality

# The qualities that count in a leader

An effective leader possesses a combination of skills, qualities and behaviours that enable them to guide and inspire their team. Here, our expert outlines the key attributes that those at the top should strive for

**B**EFORE looking at the attributes of an effective leader, it's my experience that the construction industry doesn't invest enough in developing such skills. If you're lucky, you may have had some experienced leader take you under their wing during your career. If not, then you might have been fortunate enough to be able to observe at close hand an effective leader.

Outwith these avenues, there's very little investment in leadership training, either formal or informal. Yet despite this lack of investment, we still expect employees who show promise to step up and lead a project or lead a team and do it well. But how realistic is that?

## INTEGRITY MATTERS

The first essential aspect of effective leadership is integrity and ethical behaviour.

A good leader consistently acts with honesty, fairness and transparency in all their interactions. They uphold high ethical standards, demonstrate integrity in their decision-making and inspire trust and respect from their team members.

Through integrity, a leader can create a culture of accountability, build credibility and set a positive example for others. Without integrity, it's impossible to build trust with your team.

## CLARITY IS CRUCIAL

Effective communication is another vital skill for a leader to succeed in their role. A leader must be able to clearly convey their vision, expectations and goals to their team in a way that's easily understandable.

They should be able to listen actively to their team members, provide constructive feedback and foster open dialogue.

Communication is a two-way street and a leader who can listen and communicate effectively will more readily build trust and rapport with their team.

## DECISIONS, DECISIONS

A strong leader must possess excellent decision-making skills. They should be able to analyse situations, weigh up the pros and cons and make informed decisions in a timely manner.

A good leader must also be prepared to take calculated risks when required and be able to adjust to ever-changing circumstances. It's important for a leader to be decisive and confident in their choices, as this will inspire confidence in their team as well.

## BE AN INSPIRATION

Another crucial aspect of effective leadership is the ability to inspire and motivate others. A great leader can influence their team members to work towards a shared vision and goals. They lead by example, exhibiting a positive attitude that energises and motivates those around them.

By providing encouragement, recognition and support, a leader can boost morale and foster a positive work environment that encourages productivity and collaboration.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPATHY

Emotional intelligence plays a key role in effective leadership. A leader who possesses emotional intelligence can understand and manage their own emotions, as well as those of others.



**"THEY LEAD BY EXAMPLE, EXHIBITING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE THAT ENERGISES AND MOTIVATES THOSE AROUND THEM"**

They are empathetic, able to build strong relationships and skilled at resolving conflicts. Emotional intelligence enables a leader to connect with their team on a deeper level, build trust and loyalty and create a cohesive and harmonious work environment.

#### **A STRATEGIC APPROACH**

In addition to these interpersonal skills, a good leader must also possess strong organisational and strategic competence. Effective leaders set clear goals, create action plans and delegate tasks efficiently to their team. They are also not afraid to hold others to account.

They can manage resources effectively, make strategic decisions that align with the organisation's objectives and monitor the team's performance towards the desired outcomes. A leader who is well organised and strategic in their attitude is more likely to achieve success.

#### **THE KEY INGREDIENTS**

In today's hyper-paced and ever-changing world, leaders must be able to expertly navigate uncertainty, overcome challenges and adapt to new situations quickly. A resilient leader will bounce back from setbacks, they learn from failure, both theirs and others, and they lead their team through challenges with composure. By remaining calm, flexible and agile, a leader can guide their team through change and uncertainty with confidence and determination.

To conclude, effective leadership is multi-faceted and encompasses a broad range of skills, qualities and behaviours.

A great leader will effectively communicate the organisation's purpose, make sound decisions, inspire and motivate others, demonstrate emotional intelligence, possess strong organisational and strategic competence, exhibit adaptability and resilience and, most importantly, act with integrity and ethics.

By demonstrating these characteristics, a leader can guide their team towards success, foster a positive work environment and achieve exceptional results.

Leadership is a journey of continuous learning and growth. Few people naturally possess all these abilities so they need to be observed, learned and worked on, so that they become second nature.

The construction industry is a complex and challenging environment that requires effective leadership for businesses to thrive. To me, the industry needs to invest more in developing these competences. It is far too important to leave it to chance. ■

# Ten tips on creating a top team

Building a high-performing team is crucial for success. So where do you start? Our industry insider is here to explain how to create and nurture an effective and engaged workplace

**A** **HIGH-PERFORMING** team not only achieves its goals efficiently but also fosters innovation, collaboration and a positive work environment.

However, very few leaders manage to create and sustain such a team, with only 23% of employees in 2022 saying they felt engaged with their workplace, according to Gallup's State of the Global Workplace Report.

Such a shockingly low figure suggests that high performance is currently only a pipe dream for most business leaders, so here are 10 suggested strategies to help kick-start your route to success...

## CLEAR VISION AND SHARED GOALS

A high-performing team starts with a clear vision and well-defined goals. Every team member must fully understand the team's purpose, objectives, and the larger organisational mission. Clear goals help individuals understand their roles and responsibilities and enables them to take ownership, making it easier to track progress and measure success. When team members share a common purpose, it creates a sense of alignment and a collective drive to achieve results.

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Open and transparent communication across the business is the cornerstone of a high-performing

team. Regularly sharing information and updates and providing feedback ensures that everyone is on the same page and pulling in the same direction. Encouraging active listening – something most of us are not good at – and providing a platform

for team members to voice their ideas, concerns and suggestions fosters a culture of collaboration and respect. Effective communication also prevents misunderstandings, reduces conflicts and enables the team to adapt swiftly to changes.

## DIVERSE SKILL SETS AND ROLES

A high-performing team is composed of individuals with diverse skill sets and expertise that complement one another. When team members bring different strengths and perspectives to the table, it enhances problem-solving and creativity. Assigning roles based on individual strengths and expertise allows each member to contribute effectively and feel valued for their unique contributions. All too often, teams can lack this diversity, with most having shared backgrounds, skills and experiences, which can lead to "group think".

## SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP

Leaders play a critical role in shaping a team's culture and performance. A supportive and empowering leadership style encourages autonomy, accountability and trust within the team. Leaders should provide guidance and resources while allowing team members the freedom to make decisions and take ownership of their work. Authentic and empathetic leaders who understand their team members' needs



**"INVESTING IN THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF TEAM MEMBERS IS ESSENTIAL FOR MAINTAINING HIGH PERFORMANCE"**



development. Creating a safe environment where team members can give and receive feedback fosters mutual respect and a commitment to continuous improvement.

### **COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING**

Involve team members in the decision-making process, especially when the decisions directly impact their work. Collaborative decision-making not only leads to better solutions but also empowers team members and fosters a sense of ownership. When individuals feel that their opinions matter and are valued, they are more likely to be invested in the team's success.

### **FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY**

The business landscape is constantly evolving, and high-performing teams are agile and adaptable. Encourage a culture of flexibility that embraces change and innovation. Team members should be comfortable stepping out of their comfort zones and exploring new approaches to solving problems. A willingness to adapt to new challenges and opportunities is essential for maintaining peak performance.

### **WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND WELLBEING**

A high-performing team is not solely defined by work-related accomplishments; it also prioritises the wellbeing of its members. Leaders need to recognise the importance of a good work-life balance and create an environment where team members can recharge and maintain their physical and mental health. Supporting wellbeing leads to higher job satisfaction, increased productivity and reduced burnout.

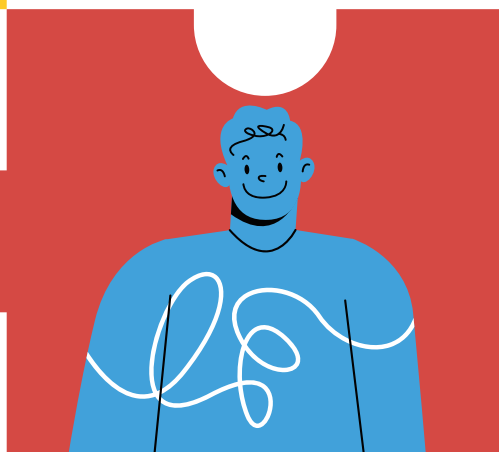
This not an exhaustive list, however each of the above points needs to be considered and balanced as too much focus on one area will have a negative impact on the team environment and dynamic.

Creating a high-performing team requires a combination of strategic planning, effective communication, leadership support and

commitment, and a focus on individual and collective growth.

By fostering a collaborative and supportive environment that values diversity, encourages innovation and maintains a strong sense of purpose, you can cultivate a team that consistently exceeds expectations and drives success.

It takes time, effort and ongoing commitment, but the rewards in terms of improved performance, employee satisfaction and organisational achievement are well worth the investment. ■



and aspirations create an environment where everyone can thrive.

### **CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Investing in the growth and development of team members is essential for maintaining high performance. Providing opportunities for training, skill enhancement and career progression

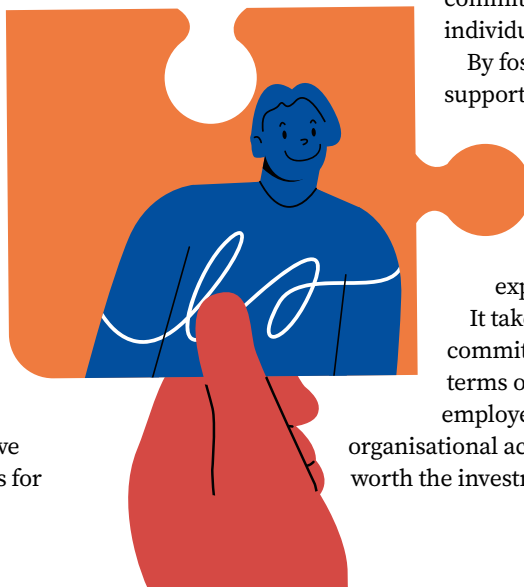
not only improves individual capabilities but also contributes to the team's overall competence. A commitment to ongoing learning ensures that the team remains adaptable in a rapidly changing business landscape.

### **RECOGNISING AND REWARDING EXCELLENCE**

Acknowledging and celebrating achievements boosts team morale and motivation. Recognising individual and collective efforts, whether through formal awards or simple expressions of appreciation, reinforces a culture of excellence. When team members feel valued and appreciated, they are more likely to maintain their dedication and continue striving for exceptional performance.

### **CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK AND GROWTH MINDSET**

Feedback is a powerful tool for improvement and growth. Encouraging a growth mindset means viewing challenges as opportunities to learn and improve rather than as failures. Regular feedback sessions should focus on both positive accomplishments and areas for



# How to keep your people engaged

Improving staff engagement is crucial for enhancing productivity, safety and project success, so here are some key strategies to create a more switched-on workforce

**T**HE state of employee engagement in the UK remains low, with only around a third of workers reported as being

highly engaged and productivity lagging at nearly 20% behind other G7 countries.

Increased economic uncertainty means improving engagement and associated productivity gains is vital to support the wellbeing of our people, industry and economy.

However, according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS), productivity in the construction sector has changed little in the last 50 years, despite the advances in working practices and technology. A recent ONS report on productivity in UK construction highlighted that:

- Direct costs of avoidable errors are estimated to be around 5% of project value, equating to approximately £5 billion per year
- When including unmeasured and indirect costs, estimates of the total cost of poor quality and errors rises to 10-25% of project costs, potentially exceeding £20 billion annually
- While output per hour worked across the whole UK economy rose by 28.8% between 1997 and 2020, it fell by 7.3% in construction over the same period.

Such poor productivity has significant economic cost at both the micro and

macro level and is particularly frustrating when we all know that employee engagement in construction goes beyond the typical 9-to-5 work schedule.

Engaged workers are emotionally invested in the success of their projects, the wellbeing of their team members and the overall safety of the site.

This emotional involvement leads to a more productive and cohesive work environment, contributing significantly to project success.

So what are some of the key factors that can influence employee engagement? Well, for starters:

- **Leadership styles:** Strong leadership is fundamental to improving engagement. The best managers aren't just supervisors, they inspire and lead by example, take an active interest in employee development and make them feel valued.

**"BY FOCUSING ON STRONG LEADERSHIP, EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION, SAFETY AWARENESS AND EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT, YOU CAN CREATE A MORE ENGAGED, PRODUCTIVE AND SATISFIED WORKFORCE"**





## STEPS TO IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT

- **Leadership commitment** – support and engage with workplace initiatives like training and mentoring schemes and make yourself visible to the workforce.
- **Regular feedback meetings** – implement catch-ups between managers and team members on a monthly or quarterly basis to keep employees engaged.
- **Effective communication channels** – utilise things like mobile news feeds, SMS alerts and push notifications to give employees equal access to corporate messages.
- **Clear objectives and key results** – implement clear, cascading goals from the company level down to individual objectives.
- **Work-life balance** – encourage and organise activities for employees outside work, e.g. social events, golf, bowling, cycling days.
- **Recognition and rewards** – celebrate and reward great pieces of work to show appreciation for employees' efforts.
- **Training and development opportunities** – provide ample opportunities and clear paths for skill development and career progression.
- **Empower employees** – encourage distributed leadership models, especially in SMEs, and learn to delegate core business planning responsibilities.

• **Effective communication:** This is equally crucial, so it's essential to go beyond regular team meetings and toolbox talks and ensure that important messages consistently reach all employees to make them feel they belong.

• **Safety and risk perception:** Engaged construction employees demonstrate heightened alertness and keen risk perception on job sites, which acts as a shield against potential hazards. By fostering a culture of engagement and vigilance, companies can significantly enhance safety.

• **Proactive participation:** When employees are engaged, they take ownership of their responsibilities in maintaining a secure environment. This proactive involvement includes reporting near-misses and suggesting safety improvements – a critical factor in accident prevention.

As well as understanding the factors that can influence engagement, it's equally important to implement successful strategies to overcome challenges such as:

• **Resistance to change** – resistance is common, but can be helped by comprehensive training programmes

and transparent communication about the benefits of a safety-focused, engaged culture.

• **An undynamic environment** – our industry is constantly evolving, so it's vital to seek feedback from frontline workers to adapt safety strategies and policies to ever-changing needs.

• **Resource allocation** – strategic investment in engagement and safety programmes can improve productivity and morale and reduce employee turnover, which is a massive issue for us all.

• **No measurement of success** – to gauge the effectiveness of engagement initiatives, implement regular surveys or feedback mechanisms. Monitor key performance indicators such as employee turnover

rates, safety incident reports and productivity metrics. Additionally, track the participation rates in training programmes and company events as indicators of engagement levels.

As you can see, improving staff engagement in our industry is a multi-faceted endeavour that requires commitment from all levels of an organisation.

As the sector continues to face challenges such as skills shortages and technological advancements, fostering a culture of engagement will be crucial if you want to thrive in an increasingly competitive landscape.

By focusing on strong leadership, effective communication, safety awareness and the development of employees, you **CAN** create a more engaged, productive and satisfied workforce.

The benefits of such a team extend beyond individual job satisfaction and can contribute to safer work environments, higher quality outputs and more successful project delivery.

So start engaging with staff happiness and begin building a foundation for long-term success – one engaged employee at a time. ■

# The best ways to train and retain

With an ageing workforce, downturn in overseas workers and rise in technology, effective recruitment and retention strategies are more important than ever. Our expert runs through the dos and don'ts for keeping your talent pool topped up...

**T**HERE is no doubt that the UK construction industry faces significant challenges in recruitment and retention of skilled workers, with 20% of tradespeople currently aged over 50 and a further 15% in their 60s.

As well as an ageing workforce, many of the 17% of the workforce who were born outside the UK have left post-Brexit. And ongoing technological advancements such as building information modelling (BIM) and artificial intelligence (AI) will likely have an impact on job roles and numbers.

Coupled with changing working patterns, this means companies must adopt innovative strategies to attract and then retain talent, so here are some ways to stop the rot.

## PROMOTING THE INDUSTRY AS A POSITIVE CAREER

The industry must focus on enhancing its image to attract new talent. According to a recent YouGov poll, only 3% of 18-24-year-olds searched for a job in construction, so the old image of a dirty, cold and dangerous job obviously still rings true with parents and teachers.

Despite this negativity, much has changed for the better, with women now making up 15% of the workforce and 37% of all new workers coming into the industry. Great strides have been made in improving safety, technology and conditions, but clearly more needs to be done to promote the industry as a positive career destination, such as:

- Partnering with schools, colleges and universities to provide information about career opportunities and offering site visits, career talks and work placements.

- Using traditional and social media to highlight the diverse roles in the industry, successful projects and career success stories. I'm amazed the industry doesn't enjoy a higher profile – after all, without construction, we'd still be living in caves!

## APPRENTICESHIPS AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Providing comprehensive training programmes is essential to develop skilled workers, e.g.:

- Offering apprenticeships like the SJIB Modern Apprenticeship in Electrical Installation allows individuals to earn while they learn, gaining valuable on-the-job experience. These programmes need to be well-structured and lead to recognised qualifications.
- Encouraging and facilitating continuous professional development (CPD) helps workers upskill and can enhance job satisfaction and career progression. In my experience, if you're not investing in your workforce's personal development, they'll go somewhere else that will. No business can afford to lose its best talent.

## COMPETITIVE COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

Attracting and retaining workers requires competitive compensation packages – and the key word here is 'competitive', so consider:

- Regularly reviewing and adjusting salaries to ensure they remain competitive within the market.
- Offering comprehensive benefits, including health insurance, retirement plans, and bonuses. Non-monetary benefits such as flexible working hours and additional leave are also now more desirable.



VACANT

## "IN MY EXPERIENCE, IF YOU'RE NOT INVESTING IN YOUR WORKFORCE'S PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, THEY'LL GO SOMEWHERE ELSE THAT WILL"

### CAREER PROGRESSION OPPORTUNITIES

Clear career progression pathways can motivate employees, with things like:

- Prioritising internal candidates for new roles and providing clear guidelines on how to advance within the company.
- Establishing mentorship programmes where experienced workers guide newer employees, providing career advice and support. Recruiting external mentors can also help your staff get access to the expertise they need to progress their career.

### EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Modernising the industry can make it more attractive to younger workers. Children now are born into a digital world; it is the language they speak and construction needs to ensure it reflects this. So think about:

- Adopting new technologies, e.g. implementing BIM, drones and other construction technologies to streamline processes and appeal to tech-savvy individuals.
- Emphasising sustainable construction practices and green building techniques to attract workers passionate about environmental issues.

### DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Promoting diversity and inclusion can widen the talent pool, for example:

- Ensuring recruitment processes are free from bias and promoting a culture of inclusion.
- Providing targeted support and development opportunities for women, ethnic minorities and other under-represented groups in the industry.

### HEALTH AND SAFETY FOCUS

A strong commitment to health and safety can improve worker satisfaction and retention, through things such as:

- Implementing and enforcing stringent health and safety measures to ensure a safe working environment.
- Offering mental health support and recognising the importance of mental wellbeing in the workplace. Government, businesses and industry bodies need to do more to address mental health in the construction industry.

### EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND WELLBEING

Engaged and satisfied employees are more likely to stay, so consider:

- Conducting regular employee surveys and feedback sessions to understand and address concerns.
- Implementing wellness programmes that focus on physical and mental health, including fitness programmes, counselling services and stress management workshops.

### COLLABORATION WITH INDUSTRY BODIES

Working with industry organisations can enhance recruitment and retention efforts, e.g.:

- Collaborating with bodies like SELECT and the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) to access funding, training resources and best practices.
- Participating in industry conferences, seminars and job fairs to connect with potential recruits and stay updated on industry trends.

### FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Adapting to modern work preferences can make the industry more attractive, such as:

- Allowing flexible schedules where feasible, such as staggered start times or compressed work weeks.
- For roles that can be performed remotely, offering remote work options to attract talent from a broader geographic area.

### BUILDING A STRONG EMPLOYER BRAND

A positive employer brand is a great way to attract top talent, for example:

- Showcasing the company's culture, values and benefits through marketing campaigns.
- Sharing stories and testimonials from current employees to highlight the positive aspects of working for the company.
- Introducing a funded referral scheme for current employees to recommend the business to friends and family.

The UK construction industry must adopt a multifaceted approach to effectively recruit and retain skilled workers and the current recruitment and retention challenges need to be addressed **NOW**.

By adopting the above recommendations, companies can create a more attractive and supportive environment for existing and potential employees.

These strategies not only help in meeting the immediate staffing needs but also contribute to the long-term sustainability and growth of this vital industry. ■

# It's vital to have the right values

If you want to stand out in a crowded marketplace, the power of business values cannot be overstated. But what are they, how do you identify them and why should your business have some? Our industry insider is here with all the answers...

**I**n today's highly competitive business environment, a key differentiator and potential source of competitive advantage are a business's values.

In my 20 years' experience as a business consultant, I'm still shocked – although not surprised – when I ask a business leader what their values are and they're unable to articulate what their business actually stands for.

If the leadership can't articulate this, and they're usually the ones who determine what the values are, what chance do the staff and customers have?

## WHAT ARE BUSINESS VALUES AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

Put simply, business values are the set of principles and beliefs that guide the decision-making process of a

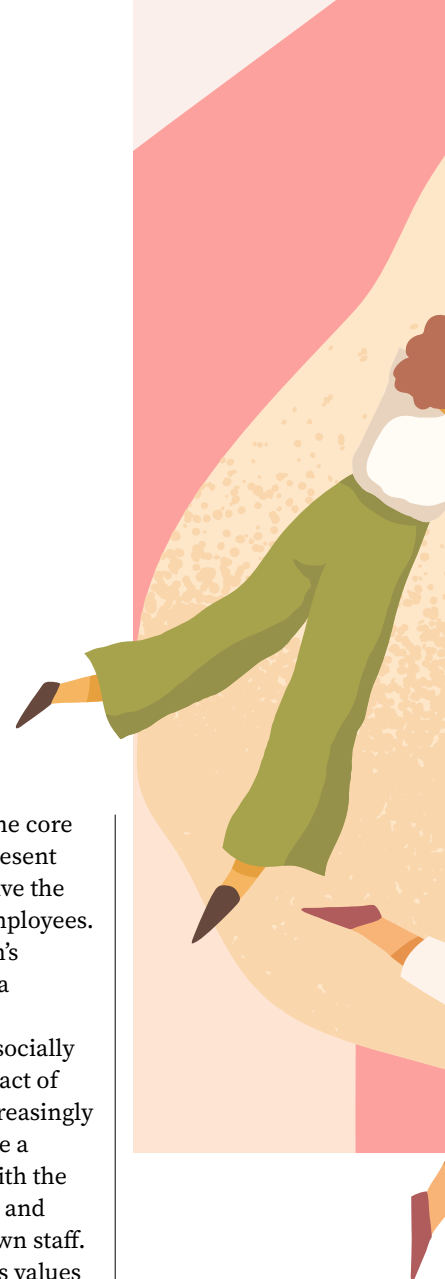
company. These values define the core of a company's culture and represent the fundamental beliefs that drive the actions and behaviours of its employees. They are vital to an organisation's success as they can help create a competitive advantage.

As consumers become more socially conscious and aware of the impact of their purchases, it becomes increasingly important for businesses to have a strong set of values that align with the expectations of their customers and with the expectations of their own staff.

Firstly, having strong business values can help a company establish a clear identity and purpose. When a company has a set of core values that are well-defined and communicated effectively, it creates a sense of clarity and direction that can inspire, engage and motivate its employees. This clarity of purpose can also help the company to differentiate itself from its competitors, which is becoming increasingly important in today's crowded and competitive landscape.

By having a unique set of values that resonate with its customers, a company can also build loyalty, as people prefer to do business with businesses who share a similar values system. It is also worth noting that in many instances where the business and customers are aligned, customers may be willing to pay a premium for your products or services.

Secondly, business values can help to build a positive company culture. When



## BUSINESS VALUES AT WORK

### NO1: INTEGRITY

A company that values integrity is committed to being honest and ethical in all its interactions. This means being transparent with customers, suppliers and employees and acting in the best interest of all stakeholders. In my experience, most companies will state that integrity is one of their core values, and so it should be. However, do the actions of the company and its employees support this? In my opinion, it is easy to make this claim, but does it stand up to scrutiny? Having worked in the construction industry for more than 20 years and supported more than 300 businesses in their development and growth, I have seen many claim to have integrity as a core value, but their actions don't support this. Ripping suppliers off, holding back payment or unfairly reducing payments does not demonstrate integrity to me. Unfortunately, these practices are still a daily occurrence.



## BUSINESS VALUES AT WORK NO2: INNOVATION

A company that values innovation is committed to finding new and better ways of doing things. This means encouraging employees to take calculated risks, experiment with new ideas and challenge the status quo. For example, a technology company might have a value of innovation that encourages employees to develop new products and services that can disrupt the market. Companies that have innovation as a core value will actively encourage their staff to experiment (within reason) to find new ways to deliver for their clients. They accept that some mistakes will be made, but they treat these as learning opportunities. The construction industry has been slow, in my opinion, to embrace innovation, but with the introduction of MMC, modularisation, BIM, robotics and AI, some businesses have now fully committed to innovation.

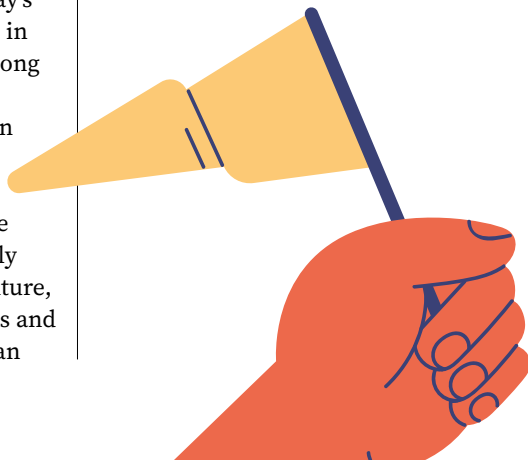
employees understand and embody the company's values, it creates a sense of shared purpose and belonging that can foster a positive and supportive work environment. This can lead to increased employee engagement, productivity and retention.

Employees who feel connected to the company's values are more likely to be passionate about their work, and they are more likely to go above and beyond to achieve the company's goals.

Thirdly, business values can help to attract and retain top talent. In today's job market, talented employees are in high demand. By having a set of strong values that align with the values of potential employees, a company can differentiate itself and attract the best candidates.

In addition, employees who share the company's values are more likely to be a good fit for the company culture, which can lead to long-term success and growth. Let me illustrate this with an

**"WHEN A COMPANY HAS A SET OF CORE VALUES THAT ARE WELL-DEFINED AND COMMUNICATED EFFECTIVELY, IT CREATES A SENSE OF CLARITY AND DIRECTION THAT CAN INSPIRE, ENGAGE AND MOTIVATE ITS EMPLOYEES"**



example. Many years ago, when I was working for a main contractor, it became very apparent the importance that business values had in the recruitment process. The contractor typically recruited people because of their skillset or experience but never once considered: "Will this recruit fit into the business's culture or share its value systems?"

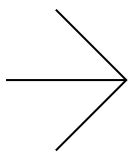
Unfortunately, what frequently happened was that the business would eventually realise the individual didn't belong and would engineer them out of the business, or the individual would realise the fit was wrong and would leave. Either way, it cost the contractor hundreds of thousands of pounds annually in recruitment costs.

Values therefore need to be a fundamental consideration when employing any recruit, as the cost of getting it wrong can be significant.

Fourthly, business values can help to build trust with customers. Customers are increasingly aware of the social and environmental impact of their spending and want to support companies that share their values and are committed to making a positive impact on the world.

By having a set of values that align with the values of its customers, a company can build trust and loyalty, which can lead to sustainable growth.

Fifthly, business values help to guide decision-making. When a company



has a clear set of values that guide its decision-making process, it can ensure that it is making ethical and responsible choices on a consistent basis. This can help to mitigate risk and prevent potential scandals or reputational damage.

By aligning its values with its actions, a company can demonstrate its commitment to its customers and stakeholders.

**WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU GO AGAINST YOUR VALUES?**

If a company goes against its values, it can have serious consequences for the company’s reputation, employee morale, customer loyalty and overall viability.

When a company’s actions don’t align with its values, it can create a sense of distrust and disillusionment among employees, customers and stakeholders.

For example, if a company claims to value environmental sustainability but is found to be engaging in practices that harm the environment, it can seriously damage its reputation and result in a loss of trust from its customers. Think of the Volkswagen diesel scandal.

When a company goes against its values, it can also have legal and financial consequences.

For example, if a company is found to be engaging in unethical or illegal practices, it can face fines, legal action and damage to its brand reputation. In extreme cases, it can even lead to the collapse of the company.

Overall, it is essential for companies

to stay true to their values, as this can help to build trust and loyalty with employees, customers and stakeholders. This means so much more than just creating a set of fancy value statements that are heavily promoted by the company but don’t bear any resemblance to the way the business or its people operate.

If a company finds that its values are no longer aligned with its actions,

**“WHEN A COMPANY GOES AGAINST ITS VALUES, IT CAN ALSO HAVE LEGAL AND FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES”**

it should take immediate steps to realign its practices with its values and regain the trust of stakeholders. This may involve making changes to its policies, procedures, culture and in some cases its people, to ensure that its values are reflected in every aspect of its operations.

I have seen first-hand the benefits that a clearly articulated and embedded set of business values can have, when the leadership pays more than lip service to them but is committed to live by their values.

It is a win-win situation for the business, its people, customers and suppliers. ■



**BUSINESS VALUES AT WORK**

**NO3: CUSTOMER FOCUS**

A company that values customer focus is committed to putting the needs and interests of its customers first. This means listening to customer feedback, responding to their needs and concerns and providing high-quality products and services. Companies with customer focus as a core business value will go the extra mile to ensure their customers are completely satisfied with the interaction. There is no doubt that customers of the construction industry are more knowledgeable and discerning now than ever and as a result their expectations are higher than ever. To build loyalty and generate repeat business, construction businesses need to be more customer-focused. That means developing a better understanding of the customer’s needs, providing a service which adds value to the customer’s business and putting the effort into developing the relationship.

MORE THAN  
**30 TOPICS**  
AVAILABLE FROM  
£35 + VAT

# BUSINESS SKILLS E-learning training

With more than 30 topics to choose from, the Business Skills suite offers a selection of practical learning to enhance professional development and productivity for you and your employees.



Leadership skills



Negotiation



Supervising mental health at work



Objective setting



Effective delegation



Developing teamwork



Managing sickness and absence



Conflict resolution in the workplace



Social media marketing

TO BOOK, EMAIL [TRAINING@SELECT.ORG.UK](mailto:TRAINING@SELECT.ORG.UK)  
OR CALL 0131 445 5577

[WWW.SELECT.ORG.UK/TRAINING](http://WWW.SELECT.ORG.UK/TRAINING)

**SELECT**

*Excellence in Skills*

# Make your people the priority

Motivating your staff requires clear communication, professional development and a positive work environment. The result is an engaged workforce that drives your company's success. So here's how to do it...

**W**ITH limited resources and tight budgets, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face unique challenges when it comes to motivating their workforce and must find creative ways to keep their employees engaged, productive and committed to the company's success.

If you or your management team see any of the following signs on a regular basis, you **MUST** take action to address them:

- Decreased productivity or quality of work
- Poor or mediocre performance
- Increased errors and mistakes
- Low morale and negativity
- High employee turnover and absenteeism
- Decline in customer satisfaction or revenues
- Missed opportunities for growth and development.

The above are clear signs that motivation levels are on the wane, so here are eight areas you should focus on if you want to improve morale.

## CREATE A POSITIVE WORK CULTURE

A positive work culture is the foundation of employee motivation. SMEs have the advantage of fostering a close-knit atmosphere that can significantly boost morale, sense of belonging and engagement.

- **Foster inclusivity and collaboration:** Encourage teamwork through cross-department projects and team-building exercises. This not only improves communication but also helps employees feel more connected to colleagues and the company's mission.
- **Address conflicts promptly:** In a small business environment, conflicts can quickly escalate and affect the entire team. Leaders should address issues promptly and maintain open communication channels to ensure harmony.

- **Promote work-life balance:** Respect boundaries by minimising after-hours communications and avoiding excessive workloads. Offering flexible working hours or remote work opportunities can significantly improve employee satisfaction and motivation.

## SET CLEAR GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

Employees are more motivated when they understand their role in the company's success and have clear objectives to work towards.

- **Involve employees in the vision:** Connect your employees' work to the overall company vision. Regularly communicate and discuss the company's mission, goals and values with your team.
- **Set meaningful individual goals:** Establish clear, achievable goals for each employee that align with the company's objectives. This gives team members a sense of direction and accomplishment.
- **Provide regular feedback:** Offer timely, constructive feedback on performance. This helps employees understand their progress and areas for improvement.

## RECOGNISE AND REWARD ACHIEVEMENTS

Recognition is one of the most effective motivators in business, especially in SMEs where individual contributions can have a significant impact on the company's success.

- **Implement recognition programs:** Introduce initiatives like Employee of the Month or celebrate team milestones to boost morale.
- **Tailor rewards to individual preferences:** Offer a variety of rewards, such as bonuses, additional leave days or public recognition, to cater to different preferences.
- **Use social recognition:** Leverage social media or internal communication channels to highlight achievements. Remember "success breeds success".

## FOSTER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Investing in employee growth not only improves skills but also demonstrates the company's commitment to its workforce.

- **Offer training and development opportunities:** Provide access to learning resources, workshops or



industry conferences. This satisfies employees' desire for growth and signals potential for advancement.

- **Encourage continuous learning:** In a rapidly changing business environment, encourage employees to keep learning and challenging themselves. This helps make your business more agile and competitive. It is not always the strongest who survive, it's the ones who adapt best.
- **Promote from within:** When new opportunities arise, always consider promoting existing employees first. This creates a clear path for career progression and motivates staff. Good people will leave if they can't see a clear career path.

#### ENHANCE COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY

Open and honest communication is crucial for building trust and keeping employees motivated.

- **Practise active listening:** Give employees your full

attention when they share ideas or concerns. This makes them feel valued and heard.

- **Share company updates:** Keep your team informed about the company's progress, challenges and prospects. This transparency helps employees feel more connected to the business.
- **Encourage idea sharing:** Create an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas. This can lead to innovative solutions and an increased sense of ownership among staff.

#### PROVIDE AUTONOMY AND TRUST

Empowering employees with a sense of ownership over their workload can boost motivation.

- **Delegate responsibility:** Give employees the freedom to make decisions. This demonstrates trust and encourages initiative.
- **Encourage problem-solving:** Instead of micromanaging, allow employees to find solutions. This fosters creativity and builds confidence.
- **Support calculated risk-taking:** Create an environment where employees feel safe to take calculated risks. This can lead to innovation and personal growth.

Offer competitive compensation and benefits

While not the only factor, fair compensation is fundamental to employee motivation.

- **Ensure fair pay:** Regularly review and adjust salaries to ensure they remain competitive.
- **Consider performance-based incentives:** Implement bonuses or profit-sharing schemes to motivate employees further.
- **Provide comprehensive benefits:** Offer a range of benefits that cater to different employee needs, such as health insurance, retirement plans or wellness programmes. The financial package needs to be competitive, but other factors such as recognition, trust, meaningful work and autonomy can carry more weight.

#### CREATE A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

A supportive workplace is essential for maintaining high levels of motivation and engagement.

- **Prioritise health and safety:** Ensure your workplace meets all safety standards and promotes employee wellbeing.
- **Offer emotional support:** Provide resources for mental health and stress management.
- **Foster strong relationships:** Encourage managers to build trusting relationships with their team members. Strong interpersonal connections can significantly enhance motivation.

By focusing on these key areas, SMEs can create a work environment where employees feel valued, challenged and motivated. This not only leads to increased productivity but also helps in attracting and retaining top talent. ■

# How to have those difficult conversations

Business leaders and managers often have to make challenging and uncomfortable decisions for the wellbeing of their business or team. The ability to say no and deliver bad news with compassion and professionalism is a skill that everyone should learn and perfect

**W**E all have a natural desire to be liked and accepted by others, for reasons which are deeply rooted in our evolutionary, psychological and social make-up. For these reasons, we can all find it difficult to face stressful situations and, as a result, prevaricate and put things off. However, this does us and the situation no favours.

Delivering bad news is an essential skill in both personal and professional life, so to help you navigate these difficult conversations, here are some effective ways to do it successfully.

The starting point when confronting any difficult situation is to spend adequate time preparing and planning. Failing to prepare can lead to a disjointed and unconvincing message.

Take time to reflect on your own feelings, biases and goals for the conversation, ensuring you:

- **GATHER** all the necessary information to ensure you have a complete understanding of the situation.

**"MAKE SURE YOU KEEP YOUR COMMUNICATION SIMPLE, AS A LACK OF CLARITY AND VAGUE OR UNCLEAR LANGUAGE CAN LEAD TO MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND CONFUSION"**

- **SPEAK** to relevant subject matter experts to understand company policies and procedures.
- **PLAN** what you want to say, keeping the message clear and concise.
- **ANTICIPATE** any likely questions or concerns the recipient might have and prepare suitable answers in advance.

It's vitally important to choose the right setting and timing to have the conversation. Selecting the wrong time and place can quickly lead to the discussion going awry and produce an outcome that suits neither party, so remember:

- **TRY** to choose a time when the recipient is in a calm and receptive state of mind.
- **SELECT** an appropriate, private, and comfortable setting for the conversation. Ensure there are minimal distractions, as these will only unsettle and heap more pressure on you.
- **CONSIDER** the timing and schedule the discussion at a time when the recipient can give their full attention and has time to process the news.

Start by being direct but compassionate – after all, you're dealing with another human being. Put yourself in their position; how would you like to be treated if you were in their situation?





↑ It's important to deliver bad news in a sensitive way

After the event, take time to reflect, be honest with yourself and ask what went well and what could have gone better.

Remember, the key to delivering bad news effectively is to show empathy, honesty and a willingness to support the recipient through the difficult situation.

It's important to always maintain professionalism and respect throughout the conversation, even when dealing with emotionally charged topics. If you follow this process, then the likelihood of getting the desired outcome increases.

There are no winners in avoiding these difficult conversations, but it's much better to prepare properly and follow this process than put it off. ■

Make sure that you keep your communication simple, as a lack of clarity and vague or unclear language can lead to misunderstandings and confusion. Avoid using technical or complex language that the recipient may not understand.

Always use plain language to ensure clear communication and make sure that you:

- **START** the conversation by being direct and to the point. Avoid unnecessary preambles or beating around the bush.
- **EXPRESS** empathy and understanding for the recipient's emotions and reactions. Listen to them, acknowledge their feelings and show support. Failing to consider the emotions of the recipient can come across as cold and uncaring.
- **TRY** to offer solutions or support, but don't make unrehearsed commitments. If possible, provide potential solutions or a plan to address the situation. Offering help or resources demonstrates your commitment to assisting the recipient through the difficult situation.
- **BE HONEST** about what you can and can't do to help, and don't make promises you can't keep – this will only come back to bite you further down the line.

You really need to listen, and by that I mean actively *listen* to their words, body language, facial expressions and tonality, so you get a real sense of how they are feeling and reacting to your message. Also ensure you allow appropriate time for reaction, for example:

- **AFTER** delivering bad news, give the recipient time to react and process the information. Avoid interrupting or immediately pushing for a response. Avoid assigning blame or making accusations when delivering bad news. Focus on the situation or the issue rather than making it personal. This will only antagonise the situation.
- **BE MINDFUL** not to overwhelm the recipient with too much information at once. Stick to the key points and allow them to ask questions if they want more details.
- **LISTEN** to their concerns and respond calmly – this will help defuse the situation. In emotionally charged situations it can be very easy to become defensive, particularly if the recipient reacts negatively to your message, so avoid becoming defensive or argumentative.
- **ENCOURAGE** the person to share their thoughts and feelings, and actively listen to what they have to say. Sometimes, just having someone to talk to can be a comfort.

**"PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR POSITION; HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE TREATED IF YOU WERE IN THEIR SITUATION?"**



# The many merits of a mentor

Whether starting out or an experienced leader, we all need help on our career journey at some point – particularly in the current climate. If you're uncertain of your next steps, a mentor can help you find your feet and climb the business ladder...

**IN** THE construction industry, we're all facing a myriad of challenges, from skill shortages, supply issues and recruitment problems to stringent legislation and contracts, fierce competition and ever-increasing customer expectation.

Engaging with an experienced mentor can be a highly effective and cost-efficient way of getting the support you need to overcome such challenges.

I've been fortunate throughout my career to have benefitted from tapping into the knowledge and insights provided by mentors and I still have three or four people who regularly offer advice and a healthy dose of realism when needed.

Their input and advice have certainly helped me climb the career ladder – and when I was running businesses, their support and expertise was even more valuable.

I know first-hand that leading a business can be a lonely place where it's difficult – and sometimes dangerous – to confide in colleagues. External help isn't always readily available, and it can be difficult to get someone who really understands your sector.

That's why there are real benefits to be accrued from working with an experienced mentor:

- **Experience and insight** – mentors are seasoned professionals who, as well as having a wealth of experience, have likely faced and overcome many challenges and can provide insights on how to navigate complex situations based on their own learning.
- **Networking opportunities** – mentors often have extensive networks across a variety of industries, giving you access to valuable

connections and sources of information and creating opportunities for partnerships, collaborations and career progression.

- **Objective feedback** – a good mentor provides a valuable and unbiased external perspective on your decision making and actions, which can help you avoid pitfalls and identify your strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Guidance on leadership skills** – effective leadership is an ongoing learning process, so a mentor can offer guidance on leadership skills, communication strategies and other essential qualities.
- **Career development** – mentors can assist you in setting SMART career goals, delivering advice on career avenues and skill development and identifying opportunities for growth in your organisation and the wider industry.
- **Confidentiality and trust** – the mentor-mentee relationship is built on trust, with discussions taking place in a confidential setting to ensure you are comfortable seeking advice and exploring potential solutions in a supportive environment.
- **Learning from mistakes** – a mentor will have made mistakes in their own career and can guide you to learn from their experiences, ensuring you make informed decisions and avoid similar pitfalls.



## MENTORING MADE EASY

Paul delivers a specially discounted mentoring service for SELECT Members, offering an experienced and sympathetic confidante with whom to share concerns, build constructive advice and bounce ideas off.

Specialist areas covered include growth, change management, succession planning, strategy, personal development, leadership and management skills development, marketing and bid management.

The cost for Paul's mentor service is £1,000 per month, which includes two monthly advice sessions. To find out more, email him at [paul@mcdevitt.co](mailto:paul@mcdevitt.co)

• **Personal development** – a good mentor can also contribute to your personal growth, offering insights into work-life balance, stress management and maintaining a healthy perspective on both personal and professional challenges.

• **Motivation** – a good mentor can help provide you with motivation and reassurance when you need it. And we **ALL** need it from time to time!

• **Succession planning** – for businesses, succession planning is crucial, so a mentor can assist in identifying and developing potential successors, helping to ensure a smooth transition at the appropriate time.

• **Continuous learning** – the business environment is dynamic and unpredictable, and you need to stay in tune with trends and changes. Mentors can act as guides, recommending relevant resources, sharing their own continuous learning experiences, and helping you stay ahead of the game.

Engaging a mentor could be one of the most valuable investments you make in your career, helping you streamline your operations and make better informed business decisions. A good mentor provides

**"EXTERNAL HELP ISN'T ALWAYS READILY AVAILABLE, AND IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO GET SOMEONE WHO REALLY UNDERSTANDS YOUR SECTOR"**

you with a safe support environment, a font of relevant and expert knowledge, and a practical and safe sounding board for your ideas and decisions.

Compared with other support mechanisms, such as training and consultancy, mentoring is very time effective, with sessions usually lasting a couple of hours.

Depending on your circumstances, you may only require a check-in with a mentor once a month but they will be there whenever you need them.

As well as saving you stress, time and money, a good mentor can help you find the right path when it comes to career progression – and navigate the route ahead successfully. ■

# Reducing the risk of staff burn-out

As well as the physical demands on contractors, our industry is under siege from mental and emotional strain, so it's vital to look out for this silent crisis in your workforce

**W**HILE the physical dangers of construction work are well-documented, the psychological toll on the sector's workforce remains in the shadows.

Male construction workers are almost four times more likely to die by suicide than the national average, with the human cost of poor mental health also affecting families, friends and colleagues.

The financial impact on businesses is also staggering – a 2019 study by Loughborough University found that the annual cost of stress alone is £178 million.

On a national scale, the cost is even more astronomical, with the annual bill for mental health issues in the UK estimated to be between £74 billion and £99 billion. In addition, mental health conditions account for 12.4% of all sick days – equivalent to 70 million sick days per year.

Poor mental health in construction is nothing new, but it's only in the past decade that the industry has begun to acknowledge its impact and root causes, which include:

- **Increased workloads:** With the current skills shortage and ageing workforce, there's enormous pressure on existing staff to fill gaps, leading to longer hours, lack of sleep and increased stress

levels as workers are stretched to their limits.

- **Time pressures:** In today's fast-paced world, client expectations have skyrocketed, with the constant pressure to meet unrealistic deadlines causing significant stress and anxiety among workers.

- **Dangerous work environment:** Despite a concerted effort to improve health and safety standards in recent years, the mental toll of working in such hazardous environments remains high.

- **Job security:** Client adversity to risk, payment delays and material inflation all contribute

to an environment of financial instability, with workers constantly worried about job security.

- **Time away from family:** Many construction workers face lengthy commutes and extended periods away, leading to isolation,

700  
PEOPLE

in the UK industry take their own lives every year



↑ Promote a culture where workers feel comfortable discussing mental health



**87%**  
have dealt with anxiety

loneliness, and stress. The lack of work-life balance is a significant factor in the mental health crisis in the industry.

- **Macho culture:** The industry has long been associated with a toxic environment that makes it difficult for workers to seek help when they're struggling. The stigma surrounding mental health also prevents many from getting the support they need.
- **Legacy of COVID-19:** The pandemic forced many people to re-evaluate their work-life balance, with many workers reluctant to return to the old ways of working. This shift in expectations has created tension in an industry that's traditionally been resistant to change.

On their own, each of these issues is enough to increase stress and anxiety levels. However, in the construction industry, they are often combined, creating a perfect storm that's pushing workers to their breaking point.

Addressing this mental health crisis in our industry requires a multi-faceted approach, so here are some recommendations for you to consider in your business:

- **Promote a culture of openness:** To help dismantle the macho atmosphere, businesses

should promote a culture where workers feel comfortable discussing their mental health without fear of stigma or retribution. This can be achieved through training programmes, workshops and encouraging people to lead by example.

- **Provide mental health resources:** Companies should invest in relevant resources, including access to counselling services, mental health first aiders and employee assistance programmes. Providing workers with the tools and support they need can help to reduce the impact of mental health issues.

- **Improve work-life balance:** Businesses should offer flexible working arrangements, reduce excessive overtime and encourage workers to take regular breaks. A healthier work-life balance can help to alleviate some of the stress and anxiety that workers are experiencing.

- **Address job security concerns:** Providing workers with greater job security can help to reduce the stress and anxiety associated with financial instability, so think about things such as improving financial stability through better project management and risk mitigation strategies.

**70%**  
have battled depression in the past year

**97%**  
of construction workers have experienced stress



- **Focus on training and development:** Businesses should invest in training and development programmes to upskill their existing workforce and attract new talent. By reducing the pressure on existing staff, firms can help alleviate some of the stress and anxiety they're experiencing.

- **Encourage regular check-ins:** Frequent chats with employees can help to identify potential mental health issues before they escalate. Managers should be trained to recognise the signs of stress, anxiety and depression and how to offer support to anyone who may be struggling.

The mental health crisis in the UK construction industry is a serious issue that requires immediate attention, with the human and financial costs too great to ignore.

By addressing the root causes and implementing the recommendations outlined above, businesses can help to create a healthier, more supportive environment for their workers.

The time to act is now. The wellbeing of the construction workforce – and the future of the industry – depends on it. ■

# Strive for maximum motivation

In today's ever-changing and ultra-competitive sector, motivation is the key to unlocking the full potential of your staff. So where do you start? Our industry insider is here to explain how to build a motivated team – and the value it can bring to your business

**A**s well as being the fuel that ignites our creativity, productivity and innovation, motivation is what separates us from the ordinary and allows us to achieve greatness.

With that in mind, I want to share some of my thoughts on why as business leaders we need to ensure we have a fully motivated team and why failure to do so can seriously impact on the viability of the enterprise.

There is no doubt these current challenging times that we find ourselves in, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit and the cost-of-living crisis make it increasingly difficult to ensure our employees remain motivated and engaged.

Having recently reviewed the 2023 Gallup 'State of the Global Workforce Survey', it occurred to me that much needs to be done to ensure our employees are fully engaged with the work they do and the company they work for.

On a global scale, according to Gallup:

- 23% of employees are engaged, i.e. thriving at work
- 59% are not engaged, i.e. filling a seat
- 18% are actively not engaged, i.e. saboteurs.

Unfortunately, the UK figures make for more alarming reading, with only 10%

engaged, 76% not engaged and 14% actively disengaged.

Before you press the panic button, this is only one set of figures and as with any set of statistics they shouldn't be

accepted in isolation. However, they **SHOULD** make us sit up and take notice. As a business leader, it's essential that you and your managers can effectively motivate your team so that you maintain and improve productivity levels, employee engagement and the overall success of the business. So here are my five key methods to motivate your team:

## Clear communication

Establish open lines of communication and ensure that team members understand their roles, responsibilities, and goals. Share updates, provide regular feedback, and address any concerns or questions. When team members feel well-informed and supported, they are more likely to stay motivated. In my 20-plus years in the construction industry, this is where I feel we let ourselves down and we miss a vital opportunity.

## Recognition and rewards

Always acknowledge and appreciate the efforts and achievements of individual team members and the team as a whole. Recognising their contributions publicly, such as during team meetings, town halls or through email announcements, will make



a significant and positive difference. Consider providing incentives, rewards, or opportunities for growth and development to further boost motivation. In my experience, recognition is by far the better motivator.

### Goal setting and autonomy

Actively involve team members in setting clear and challenging goals that are aligned with your business objectives. Encourage autonomy by allowing individuals to have increasing control over how they achieve their goals. This sense of ownership and empowerment can fuel motivation and foster a sense of responsibility.

### Professional development

Support the growth and development of your team members by providing training opportunities, workshops, or access to resources that enhance their skills and knowledge. Encouraging personal and professional growth demonstrates your investment in their success and can increase motivation by expanding their capabilities and opening new opportunities. This is a vital component, especially considering the current skill shortages that are impacting on the whole construction sector. Investing in your people clearly demonstrates that you care, and it is important in attracting and retaining talent.

### Positive work environment

Foster a positive work culture where team members feel valued, respected, and supported. Encourage collaboration, provide a healthy work-life balance, and create opportunities for social interaction. Celebrate achievements, no matter how small, promote a sense of camaraderie, and ensure that the workplace is inclusive and free from negativity.



**"ALWAYS ACKNOWLEDGE AND APPRECIATE THE EFFORTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF INDIVIDUAL TEAM MEMBERS AND THE TEAM AS A WHOLE"**

It's important to remember that every team is unique, so you need to tailor your motivational strategies to fit the specific needs and preferences of your team members. This should be done by regularly assessing their motivation levels, through the following means:

- Staff engagement surveys
- Productivity assessments
- Absenteeism records
- One-to-one feedback.

The Gallup survey would suggest that the large percentage of 'not engaged' employees provides ample low-hanging fruit to work on.

After all, it's in your business's interests to ensure that all employees are properly motivated and that you create the environment for them to thrive. ■

## HEED THE WARNING SIGNS

If you or your management team see any of the following signs on a regular basis you **MUST** take action to address it:

- Decreased productivity or a decline in the quality of work
- Poor or mediocre performance
- Increased errors and mistakes
- Low morale and negativity
- High employee turnover and absenteeism
- Decline in customer satisfaction or revenues
- Missed opportunities for growth and development.

# Keeping all your people connected

Communication is key to any successful business, but all too often key messages are misunderstood or lost. Our expert outlines how to make better connections in your company – and how to ensure everyone is singing from the same hymn sheet

WORDS  
**PAUL McDEVITT**  
Managing Director,  
McDevitt & Co



**M**  
**McDevitt & Co**

**I**n my 30-year career in the construction industry, the one issue that comes up time and time again is the need for better communication.

During my time in the industry, I've conducted more than 50 staff surveys across the sector, mostly with SMEs, and top of the list is always the need to improve communication. It doesn't matter the structure or the scale of the business, it's the one issue that most people agree needs to be improved.

Effective communication sits at the heart of every successful business. Whether coordinating on-site activities, negotiating with suppliers or responding to client needs, the ability of an SME to convey information clearly and consistently determines both operational efficiency and business growth.

Yet, in many SME construction firms, communication remains one of the toughest challenges. Misunderstandings, fragmented information flows and poor feedback mechanisms can lead to errors, project delays and, unfortunately, even safety incidents.

To address these issues, leaders must reshape how their organisations think about, practice and value communication.

## THE COMMUNICATION CHALLENGE

Construction-based SMEs operate in fast-paced, high-pressure environments. Teams are often distributed across multiple sites, involving a mix of internal staff, sub-contractors and clients.



The diversity of roles, from architects and engineers to builders and project managers, means that communication must bridge technical expertise, varying levels of literacy and cultural differences.

In many such businesses, leaders are accustomed to direct, task-oriented communication. Information passes quickly from the top down, often verbally or through informal channels.

While this might work for small teams, it fails once operations scale. Miscommunication can result in wastage, rework or compromised safety protocols. Employees may feel disconnected or undervalued when communication only flows in one direction.

## THE LEADERSHIP MINDSET: FROM COMMAND TO COLLABORATION

Leaders need a mindset shift – from command-based communication to collaborative communication. Traditional leadership models in construction often emphasise authority and instruction. However, modern SMEs thrive when collaboration replaces hierarchy as the communication norm.

Leaders must engage with teams not just to issue directives but also to listen actively and involve

them in decision-making. This requires empathy, patience and transparency. Instead of communicating merely to instruct, leaders should aim to inform, align and inspire. Transparency builds trust, and trust encourages employee engagement and ownership of tasks.

### **EMPHASISING STRUCTURED COMMUNICATION CHANNELS**

One of the biggest weaknesses in many contractors is the lack of structured, reliable communication channels. Too often, information is dispersed across emails, text messages or verbal briefings on-site, leading to confusion.

Leaders must establish and enforce consistent channels:

- **Daily or weekly briefings:** Short, structured meetings to review progress, safety issues and upcoming tasks. It is best if these meetings are minuted, so that a record is kept.
- **Digital platforms:** Tools like project management apps such as Procore, Buildertrend or Trello can centralise updates, documents and communications in real time.
- **Clear reporting lines:** Everyone should know whom to report to and how to escalate concerns efficiently.
- **Feedback loops:** Encourage two-way communication through surveys, check-ins or open-door policies.

Establishing these channels sends a clear signal that organised communication is a core part of company culture, not an afterthought.

### **TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT: BUILDING COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE**

Many construction professionals rise through the ranks based on technical ability, not communication prowess. That's understandable – knowing how to complete a project is critical, but communicating effectively is what ensures projects are completed safely and correctly.

Leaders should invest in regular communication training for staff at all levels. Workshops on active listening, non-verbal cues, conflict resolution and clear instruction-writing can dramatically improve interpersonal effectiveness.

Furthermore, site managers and supervisors should receive leadership mentoring that includes the application of communication theory to real-

life project management. SMEs can also integrate communication expectations into their performance metrics. When employees are evaluated partly on how well they share information and collaborate, it signals that communication isn't something that's optional – it's essential.

### **LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO BRIDGE GAPS**

Technology offers a powerful avenue for improving communication. However, many SMEs hesitate to adopt new systems, fearing complexity or additional cost. Leaders must embrace digital tools not as luxuries but as enablers of clarity and efficiency.

Cloud-based project management software is able to centralise documents, schedules and real-time updates.

Mobile apps allow construction teams to access drawings, specifications and safety alerts directly from site, minimising any errors caused by using outdated information.

Video calls and collaboration tools help connect remote teams and streamline coordination with clients and suppliers.

However, technology alone is not the answer. It must be accompanied by clear standards for usage, i.e. who updates what, how often and how communication integrates with reporting structures. Without these rules, even the best tools can become sources of confusion.

### **FOSTERING A CULTURE OF FEEDBACK AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**

Workers often hesitate to speak up, particularly when they feel their opinions will not be valued or may cause friction. Leaders need to dismantle this fear by cultivating psychological safety – a culture where everyone feels comfortable raising concerns, asking questions and offering feedback without reprisal.

Psychological safety begins with leadership behaviour. When managers admit mistakes, invite critique and thank employees for honest input, they set an example. Over time, this openness encourages proactive problem-solving and innovation. A culture that values dialogue can prevent issues before they escalate – from safety hazards to client miscommunication.

Feedback should be viewed not as criticism but as improvement fuel. Leaders can formalise this through regular performance reviews and debrief sessions after project milestones, ensuring that lessons learned translate into better communication practices.

### **ENHANCING CROSS-FUNCTIONAL UNDERSTANDING**

Construction SMEs often rely on multiple specialists whose work

**“LEADERS MUST ENGAGE WITH TEAMS NOT JUST TO ISSUE DIRECTIVES BUT ALSO TO LISTEN ACTIVELY AND INVOLVE THEM IN DECISION-MAKING”**

overlaps. Misalignment between departments, such as design and operations, can lead to costly errors. Leaders must champion cross-functional communication by ensuring teams understand one another's goals, constraints and timelines.

This can be achieved through joint planning sessions, shared documentation and interdepartmental workshops. When different teams see the broader picture, they communicate not only more clearly but also more respectfully. Empathy between functions reduces tension and fosters smoother collaboration.

**PRIORITISING COMMUNICATION IN SAFETY MANAGEMENT**

Safety is non-negotiable in construction. Yet many accidents occur because of unclear or incomplete communication.

Leaders must embed communication deeply within their safety strategies. Safety briefings should go beyond compliance – they should be interactive dialogues where all team members feel accountable for raising potential risks.

Visual aids, multilingual materials and clearly posted instructions can help overcome language or literacy barriers common in construction sites. Leaders should also reinforce safety communication through repetition and active engagement rather than dry policy dissemination.

**LEADING BY EXAMPLE**

Ultimately, improving communication in a construction business starts at the top. Employees model their behaviour after leaders. If leaders communicate clearly, listen actively and respond promptly, these behaviours spread throughout the organisation.

Consistency is key. Leaders must demonstrate respect in every interaction, whether that's with apprentices or clients, and maintain professionalism even under pressure.

**MEASURING AND SUSTAINING IMPROVEMENT**

Improving communication is not a one-time initiative – it's an ongoing evolution.

**"CONSISTENCY IS KEY. LEADERS MUST DEMONSTRATE RESPECT IN EVERY INTERACTION, WHETHER THAT'S WITH APPRENTICES OR CLIENTS, AND MAINTAIN PROFESSIONALISM EVEN UNDER PRESSURE"**



SMEs should measure the effectiveness of communication strategies through indicators such as project efficiency, safety performance, employee engagement and client satisfaction. Regular reviews and adjustments ensure the process remains dynamic.

**CONCLUSION**

For construction-based SMEs, communication is both a technical and cultural challenge. Leaders must shift from directive to collaborative communication, establish structured channels, invest in training and harness technology to ensure clarity.

More importantly, they must create environments where every team member feels heard and empowered to contribute.

Improving communication isn't about talking more – it's about talking better. With intentional leadership and consistent effort, communication can become the pillar that supports efficiency, safety and long-term success in the construction sector. ■

Paul McDevitt is Managing Director of McDevitt & Co, an experienced business consultancy that helps to inspire people, improve productivity and increase profits in the construction industry. Find out more and contact him at [www.mcdevitt.co](http://www.mcdevitt.co)



# Stay on the right page

Discover more advice on getting the best for your business in *cabletalk*, the official magazine of SELECT.



## cabletalk

Published every two months, each issue includes:

- Industry insights
- Business advice
- Technical updates
- News and events

And much more!

Find out more at [www.cabletalkmagazine.com](http://www.cabletalkmagazine.com)



# Ten top tips to foster growth

Today's contractors operate in a rapidly evolving market shaped by technology, sustainability demands, labour challenges and shifting customer expectations. Success requires you to move beyond technical expertise and embrace strategic business management, robust planning and ongoing relationship building – so here are 10 tips to help foster growth

## 01 BUILD A TEAM AROUND COMPANY VALUES

Recruiting and retaining skilled electricians is a key challenge for SMEs. Companies must develop a clear set of business values that employees can identify with, such as transparency, quality, safety and sustainability. Promoting these values can create a sense of purpose and loyalty. Investing in training, apprenticeships and team development increases technical competence and boosts employee satisfaction, retention and trust. Accredited staff lend credibility and can differentiate your firm in a crowded market.

## 02 MODERNISE OPERATIONS WITH DIGITAL TOOLS

Digital platforms for workforce scheduling, project management, cost estimation and invoicing reduce manual errors, save time and increase your capacity to take on more work. Automation of routine tasks through cloud-based solutions ensures transparent operations and improved customer communication, freeing up leadership to focus on growth opportunities.

## 03 UPDATE YOUR BUSINESS PLAN REGULARLY

A dynamic business plan enables

you to adapt to market changes. Monthly analyses on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) can reveal new competition, emerging technologies and changes in customer needs. Reviewing your plan regularly helps you set clear goals, monitor progress and correct course, whether it's scaling services, targeting a new market or adapting service models.

## 04 FOCUS ON CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

Customer satisfaction is the bedrock of repeat business and referrals. Delivering on promises, exceeding expectations and quickly addressing issues foster loyalty – a sentiment echoed by the adage, "it's 10 times easier to keep a customer than to create a new one". An active aftercare strategy – regular follow-ups, guarantees and rapid issue resolution – leads to word-of-mouth recommendations, positive reviews and lasting relationships.

## 05 SCALE GRADUALLY AND STRATEGICALLY

Adopting the Goldilocks principle – i.e. growing not too fast or slow – can help you match operational capacity with demand. Rapid expansion risks overstressing resources and incurring costly

overheads, while moving too slowly can mean missing out on new contracts or innovative niches. Strategic scaling focuses on adding services or staff in a controlled, well-planned way, supported by careful financial forecasting and market research.

## 06 DIVERSIFY SERVICE OFFERINGS

With smart technologies and green energy surging in demand, contractors who diversify into areas such as EV chargers or solar PV stand out. Upskilling the team to handle renewables, automation or building management systems opens new revenue streams and attracts high-value, niche customers seeking specialised help. Constantly scanning for emerging trends and responding proactively establishes SMEs as forward-thinking leaders.

## 07 INVEST IN SMART MARKETING

A visible and memorable brand is crucial for attracting clients. SMEs should leverage local SEO, content marketing, Google Ads and social media platforms to strengthen their reputation and reach regional contract opportunities. Professional image, optimised websites and participation in community events all develop trust and keep your business front-of-mind during client decision-making processes. Targeted campaigns should showcase unique offerings and customer testimonials for credibility.



## "A VISIBLE AND MEMORABLE BRAND IS CRUCIAL FOR ATTRACTING CLIENTS"

### 08 OPTIMISE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Healthy finances underpin business longevity and allow flexibility in uncertain economic conditions. Negotiate favourable terms with suppliers and keep a watchful eye on market prices for essential materials. Diversifying suppliers minimises the risks associated with shortages and price fluctuations. Leveraging real-time cost analysis software assists management in prompt adjustments to pricing, overheads and resource allocation.

### 09 LEVERAGE GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY SUPPORT

Numerous government schemes and industry incentives exist. The SME Loan Scheme offers interest-free loans up to £100,000 for energy efficiency and renewable upgrades, with cashback grants available for qualifying projects. Application support speeds access, while compliance ensures eligibility for future government contracts. Engaging with trade bodies also offers valuable networking,

knowledge-sharing and guidance for regulatory compliance.

### 10 ADDRESS INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

Labour shortages, retention problems and payment issues remain hurdles for contractors. Joining industry organisations, attending trade events and lobbying for fairer contract terms promote resilience and expose growth opportunities. Staying informed about sector trends such as net zero targets enables firms to reposition themselves quickly, guarding against sudden market shifts.

### CONCLUSION

By investing in team development, embracing digital transformation, refining business plans, nurturing lasting customer relationships and leveraging available support frameworks, you can overcome challenges and thrive.

A willingness to innovate and commitment to core values prepare contractors to meet – and shape – the future of the electrical sector.

In an industry where technology, regulations and customer expectations are constantly changing, those who focus on continuous improvement, strategic marketing, operational efficiency and workforce wellbeing will be best positioned for lasting success. ■



↑ A number of government schemes and industry incentives exist to support SMEs

# How to make a success of succession

Our industry expert outlines the many benefits of succession planning – and why the modern electrical business shouldn't leave it to chance when it comes to handing over the reins

**I**n my 20-plus years in the construction industry, I've seen many successful businesses come unstuck through their failure to properly plan for the succession of key personnel.

Even those who have developed their succession plans are often thrown into disarray when the unexpected happens, such as a rising star deciding their future lies elsewhere or a key player stepping aside because of ill health.

I'm not suggesting that it's possible to plan for **every** eventuality, but the laissez-faire approach to succession planning that many businesses take is really asking for trouble.

A proper succession plan, effectively communicated to all the key players, will go a significant way to helping any business cope with unexpected staff shocks.

## WHAT IS SUCCESSION PLANNING?

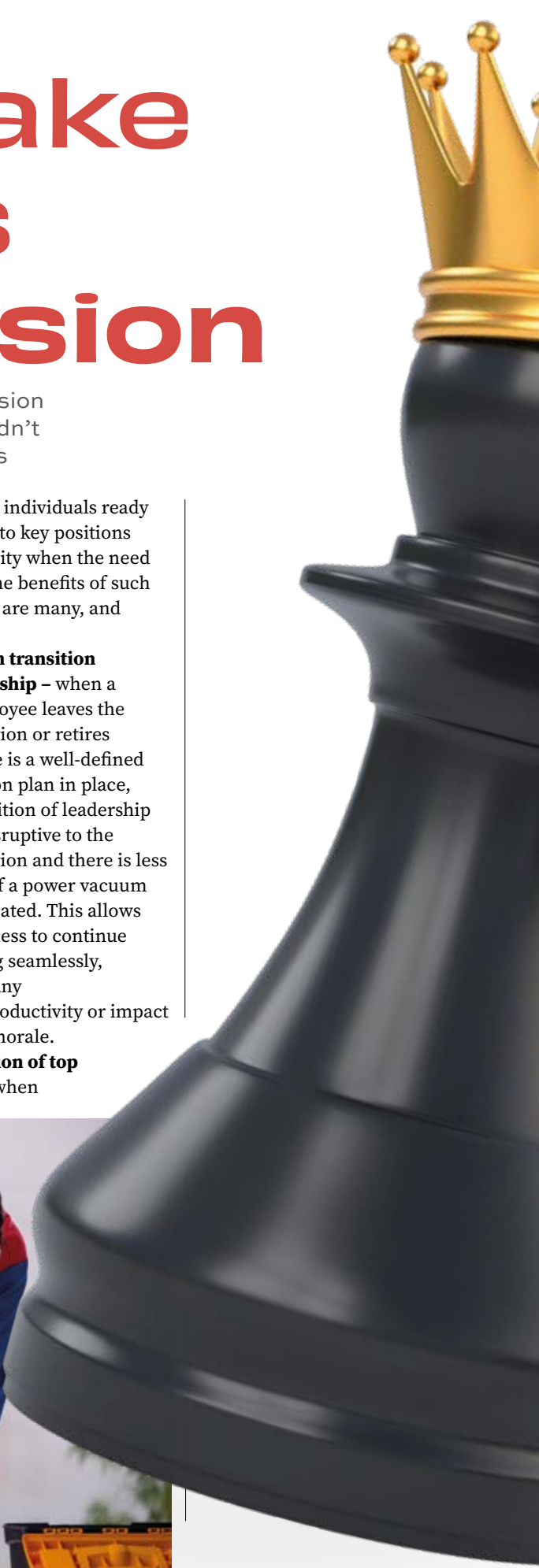
Succession planning is the process of identifying and developing employees within an organisation and/or identifying external candidates who have the potential to take on leadership roles in the future.

Effective succession planning is essential for the long-term success and viability of any business, as it ensures that there's a pipeline of capable and well-

prepared individuals ready to step into key positions of authority when the need arises. The benefits of such planning are many, and include:

- **Smooth transition of leadership** – when a key employee leaves the organisation or retires and there is a well-defined succession plan in place, the transition of leadership is less disruptive to the organisation and there is less chance of a power vacuum being created. This allows the business to continue operating seamlessly, without any loss of productivity or impact on staff morale.
- **Retention of top talent** – when

↓ Employees will feel valued if they are part of their firm's long-term strategy





employees see that there is a clear path for career advancement within the organisation, they're more likely to stay with the company long-term. This helps businesses reduce turnover and the costs associated with recruiting and training new employees. In my experience, not seeing a clear pathway is one of the main reasons talent leaves a business.

- **Improved employee engagement and morale** – employees who are part of a succession plan are likely to feel more engaged and motivated. Knowing that their employer is invested in their development and has a plan for their future can boost employee morale and loyalty, leading to increased productivity, improved quality of work and higher levels of customer satisfaction.

- **Reduced recruitment costs** – a well-defined succession plan reduces the need for external recruitment, saving on costs such as advertising, agency fees and interview expenses. Internal promotions also tend to result in faster onboarding and training times, as the employee is already familiar with the company culture and processes.

- **Continuity of company culture and values** – by

**"EFFECTIVE SUCCESSION PLANNING IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE LONG-TERM SUCCESS AND VIABILITY OF ANY BUSINESS"**



↓ Planning for the future can ensure a smooth transition of leadership

developing employees from within the organisation, new leaders are likely to already share the same values and beliefs as their predecessors. This helps to maintain the company's culture and values, which is an important factor in attracting and retaining customers and suppliers.

- **Better decision-making** – as employees are developed and trained for leadership roles, they're given the opportunity to gain experience and exposure to different aspects of the business, helping them develop a broader perspective and deeper understanding of the organisation. This results in better decision-making as the leaders have a more holistic understanding of the business and can make better informed decisions.

- **Improved business performance** – by developing and promoting employees from within, businesses can ensure that

they have a strong leadership team with the right values, skillset and experience necessary to drive growth and success and increase revenues, profitability and market share.

#### **IN CONCLUSION**

Successful succession planning is an essential process for the long-term success of any business.

Investing in such planning now can help your business build a strong pipeline of capable and well-prepared leaders who are ready to take on key positions when you need them to step up.

Failure to properly plan in advance for this succession can lead to dips in business performance, staff exodus and, in some cases, business failure.

As a business leader, you need to be planning your own succession plan and that of your key players **NOW**. Failure to do so puts your operation at needless risk. ■

# It's vital to choose the right path

The UK construction industry stands at a crossroads, facing unprecedented challenges that threaten its long-term health and sustainability. Wafer-thin margins, contractual complexity, skills shortages and an ageing workforce mean better leadership is more urgent than ever

**W**ITH the construction sector under increasing pressure to adapt quickly to a rapidly changing landscape, business leaders are expected to respond to market volatility, regulatory changes and shifting client expectations.

Over the past three decades, the industry has become more complex and uncertain, demanding a new breed of leadership that is agile, strategic and resilient.

The traditional approach, which often relied on technical expertise and incremental improvements, is no longer sufficient. Instead, leaders must be prepared to make bold decisions, embrace innovation and foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

## A LEGACY OF TECHNICAL LEADERSHIP

One of the core challenges facing construction is its historical approach to leadership development.

Most leaders have risen through the ranks based on their technical skills and excel at managing projects, solving problems and delivering results on-site. As a result, they are often promoted to

leadership positions without adequate preparation for the broader responsibilities these roles entail.

This technical bias means that many leaders lack the strategic vision and people management skills required to steer their organisations through turbulent times. They are experts in their field but may struggle to see the bigger picture, anticipate future trends or inspire their teams to achieve collective goals.

The industry's failure to invest in leadership development has left a generation of managers ill-equipped to handle the complexities of modern construction.

## THE COST OF NEGLECTING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The consequences of this neglect are becoming increasingly apparent. Without strong leadership, construction firms are more vulnerable to external shocks, less able to innovate and more likely to suffer from low morale and high staff turnover.

Moreover, the lack of leadership competence hampers the industry's ability to attract and retain talent. Young people are looking for employers who can offer them clear career progression, supportive management and opportunities for personal growth. In an industry where leadership training is often an afterthought, it is no



## **“MOST LEADERS HAVE RISEN THROUGH THE RANKS BASED ON THEIR TECHNICAL SKILLS AND EXCEL AT MANAGING PROJECTS, SOLVING PROBLEMS AND DELIVERING RESULTS ON-SITE”**

surprise that many talented individuals don't see construction as an attractive career destination.

### **THE NEED FOR A NEW LEADERSHIP PARADIGM**

To address these challenges, the construction industry must embrace a new leadership paradigm.

This means recognising that leadership is not an innate quality possessed by a select few, but a skill that can be developed and refined over time and requiring a commitment to ongoing education, mentoring and professional development at all levels.

Business leaders must be encouraged to step out of their comfort zones, challenge conventional wisdom and seek out new perspectives.

They should be equipped with the tools and techniques needed to manage change, resolve conflicts and build high-performing teams.

By investing in leadership development, construction firms can create a pipeline of future leaders who are ready to tackle the challenges of tomorrow.

### **LEARNING FROM OTHER SECTORS**

Other industries have long recognised the value of leadership development and have reaped the rewards in terms of improved performance, innovation and employee engagement.

The construction sector can learn from these examples by adopting best practices in talent management, succession planning and organisational culture.

For instance, structured leadership programmes, coaching and peer learning networks can help managers develop the skills they need to succeed.

Regular feedback, performance reviews and opportunities for reflection can also help to foster a culture of accountability and continuous improvement.

By benchmarking against other sectors, construction firms can identify gaps in their own leadership capabilities and take proactive steps to address them.

### **A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON LEADERSHIP IN CONSTRUCTION**

Having worked in the industry for more than 30 years, I've witnessed first-hand the impact of strong and weak leadership.

I recently delivered a leadership programme attended by a diverse group of business owners and managers. One participant, who had been in the industry for two decades, remarked that this was the first formal leadership training he had ever received. His experience is not unique; many people working in construction go through their entire careers without any structured development in this critical area.

This lack of investment in leadership is a missed opportunity. Effective leaders can transform organisations, drive innovation and create environments where people thrive.

They are the key to unlocking the industry's potential and ensuring its long-term success.

### **CONCLUSION: BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

The current construction model is ill-suited to the uncertainty and unpredictability of today's world.

To survive and thrive, the UK construction industry must prioritise leadership development as a strategic imperative. This means moving beyond technical excellence to embrace a more holistic approach that values adaptability, emotional intelligence and strategic thinking.

By investing in better leadership, the industry can build more resilient organisations, deliver better outcomes for clients and create rewarding careers for its people. ■

# Turning net zero goals into reality

The ongoing transition to net zero offers a promising outlook for electrical contractors. Here, we outline the opportunities in some of the key areas on the road to a greener future – and the challenges that also lie ahead

**T**HE UK's legally binding commitment to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 is fundamentally reshaping the electrical contracting sector.

This transition presents unprecedented opportunities in renewables, battery storage, data centres and AI-driven solutions, while simultaneously exposing critical challenges in skills, infrastructure and regulation.

Electrical contractors stand at the forefront of this transformation, poised to drive innovation yet also facing substantial hurdles in implementation.

## RENEWABLE ENERGY AND BATTERY STORAGE

Renewable energy integration has become a core growth area, with contractors adapting to install solar PV systems, wind generation solutions and energy-efficient technologies.

The rise of 'prosumer' systems, when consumers both produce and consume energy, creates demand for on-site generation installations and battery storage integration.

Incentives for electrical energy storage systems (EESS) and smart energy management are accelerating this shift, enabling properties to feed surplus energy back into the grid. Contractors who

**"CONTRACTORS WHO MASTER THESE TECHNOLOGIES CAN CAPTURE NEW REVENUE STREAMS, PARTICULARLY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH RENEWABLE ENERGY SPECIALISTS"**



master these technologies can capture new revenue streams, particularly through partnerships with renewable energy specialists.

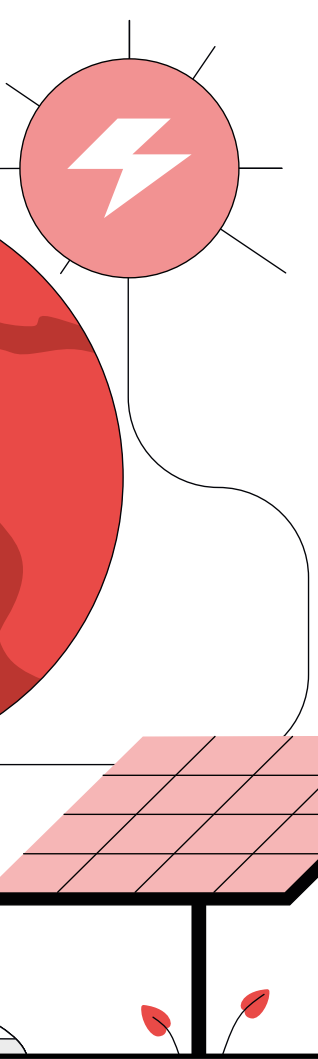
Battery storage development is equally critical, allowing excess renewable energy to be stored during peak generation times for later use. This mitigates grid strain and enhances energy resilience.

Innovative contractors are already implementing storage solutions in homes and businesses, often retrofitting existing buildings with creative approaches such as rooftop solar arrays or facade-mounted panels. These projects not only reduce reliance on fossil fuels but also position contractors as essential enablers of the energy transition.

## DATA CENTRES: A HIGH-GROWTH SECTOR

The exponential expansion of data centres represents a major opportunity, driven by AI proliferation and digitalisation. Building services contractors, particularly those specialising in mechanical, electrical and plumbing (MEP) systems, are increasingly leading these projects.

Data centres now account for more than 60% of total project value in many cases, with the UK market projected to grow from £2.3 billion to £1.1 trillion by 2030. This sector demands sophisticated electrical expertise in



power resilience, cooling systems and energy-efficient design, creating lucrative contracts for firms equipped to handle complex, high-value installations.

#### AI-DRIVEN EFFICIENCY AND CARBON REDUCTION

Artificial intelligence is emerging as a transformative tool for reducing embodied carbon in construction.

Software developed by institutions such as UWE Bristol uses machine learning to analyse construction materials and methods, identifying alternatives that lower carbon footprints during the planning phase.

This technology helps contractors meet stringent emissions caps while optimising project costs. AI also enables predictive maintenance for electrical systems and smart grid management, enhancing operational efficiency across renewable installations and storage networks.

#### CRITICAL CHALLENGES FACING THE SECTOR

Skill shortages and demographic pressures threaten to undermine progress in a number of ways:

- **High demand, insufficient supply:** The demand for electricians is outpacing supply, driven by ambitious infrastructure, housing and net zero targets. The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) forecasts that an additional 4,300 electrical installers will be needed each year by 2029, while the UK Trade Skills Index projects a need for 104,000 additional electricians by 2032.

- **Unfilled vacancies:** As of early 2025, there were nearly 10,000 unfilled electrician vacancies across the UK, making electricians one of the most sought-after trades. Despite strong apprenticeship interest, the shortage of qualified electricians jeopardises the workforce needed for renewable installations and EV infrastructure. Without urgent investment in adult retraining and youth recruitment, project delays and quality issues are inevitable.

- **Grid capacity limitations:** The UK's legacy infrastructure struggles with renewable energy's intermittency, leading to curtailment during peak generation and shortages during low-output periods. Upgrading

## "CONTRACTORS WHO INVEST IN SPECIALISED TRAINING, ADOPT EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND ADVOCATE FOR STREAMLINED POLICIES WILL LEAD THE SECTOR'S TRANSFORMATION"

grids to handle distributed energy resources requires massive investment and regulatory coordination. Additionally, complex planning processes delay projects through lengthy environmental assessments and community consultations, increasing costs.

- **Regulatory uncertainty:** Net zero demands rethinking energy governance, with

institutions such as Ofgem navigating tensions between innovation, consumer protection and infrastructure investment. The creation of the National Energy System Operator (NESO) aims to address this but requires clearer policy alignment to avoid conflicts in market structure and ownership models. Contractors need stable frameworks to justify large-scale investments in new technologies.

#### IN CONCLUSION

The net zero transition offers electrical contractors immense opportunities, positioning them as vital players in a sustainable economy. However, realising this potential demands urgent solutions to skills gaps, grid modernisation and regulatory coherence.

Contractors who invest in specialised training, adopt emerging technologies and advocate for streamlined policies will lead the sector's transformation.

As the UK accelerates toward its 2050 target, the electrical contracting industry must balance innovation with pragmatic problem-solving to turn ambitious climate goals into operational reality. ■



Catch up with more advice in **cabletalk**, delivered every two months.



Read the online version at [www.cabletalkmagazine.com](http://www.cabletalkmagazine.com)



**SELECT**  
The Walled Garden,  
Bush Estate,  
Midlothian  
EH26 0SB  
t: 0131 445 5577  
e: [admin@select.org.uk](mailto:admin@select.org.uk)