

Recently, **Ellie Rich** of Michael Page Executive Search met **Martyn Phillips**, Operations Director at B&Q who has progressed his career via the HR route to HR Director, before moving across to an Operations role. He is a down to earth Board Director; so team orientated that he wanted a photo of a store team rather than his own on this profile.

B&Q is the UK's leading DIY and garden centre retailer, the number one DIY retailer in Europe and the third largest in the world. They have over 34,000 employees and more than 45,000 inspirational home improvement and garden products for the homemaker, the occasional to serious DIY'er, and also trade professionals.

HOW IS THE BUSINESS PERFORMING CURRENTLY?

We are gaining market share in a shrinking market, having shrunk in a growing market. In 2005 we recognised our model was becoming out of date and Ian Cheshire, our CEO, led the journey to a leaner company with an agenda focused on the core business. When Ian moved to Kingfisher, Euan Sutherland joined B&Q as CEO and continued this journey. We are now focusing on increasing sales in the space we have, rather than growing space. We have slashed capital expenditure and are investing shrewdly.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT PRIORITIES?

2008 was about getting back to basics and improving store standards. Since then we have been focusing on cost management and productivity. Engaging our workforce is a big priority, as is hiring top talent in a tight market. We have been cherry picking the best talent at all levels while other businesses have been laying people off. We are now focusing on the service piece. We have moved to a smaller, leaner Board of six, which has enabled us to speed up our decision making.

WHAT IS THE VISION FOR THE FUTURE?

Protecting our core business (B&Q have 57% market share in DIY) and moving to a more design-led home improvement range – we are making the hard side harder and the soft side softer. We are focusing on our trade market to be a serious competitor and also looking at our broader services and our multi-channel offering.

WHAT ARE THE PEOPLE PRIORITIES?

Acquiring talent in a tough market and retaining our staff. We are working hard to treat our people better than ever. We have invested heavily in the introduction of a new monthly bonus scheme for store staff, based on individual store performance. Hourly paid staff can now earn up to 14% bonus a year.

As a result, we have seen absences drop from 5 to 3.5%. We have also invested massively in training and development with over 20,000 staff on either NVQ, City and Guilds or apprenticeship schemes. We have been working with our management population on performance coaching and have created the 'Podium Programme' in conjunction with the British Cycling team who we sponsored in the Beijing Olympics.

WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH TO HR?

- Be commercially credible – know how your business works and is performing
- Take accountability for business results in your area – HR people shouldn't be judged on anything other than business results
- Have 'edge' – have an opinion and confidence in it
- Be prepared to have conversations others can't have
- Have opinions beyond the HR remit
- Recognise that your best work can sometimes be invisible and you won't get the recognition – be comfortable in your own skin and accept this
- Deliver on what you started
- Don't even do something unless you know it will add value



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HOW WOULD YOUR BOARD COLLEAGUES DESCRIBE YOU?

Very driven, very loyal and very passionate about B&Q. A strong performance coach, but sometimes too unreasonable! What you see is what you get.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU HAD UNLIMITED HR BUDGET?

Save the money! Put more people on the shop floor. I don't think HR needs to cost much money.

WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR WHEN RECRUITING YOUR OWN TEAM?

I look at the team as a whole and its blend of skills. I also recruit someone better than the person who left. I am not a massive fan of competencies – instead I work to people's strengths. It's important to know what you are not good at and have a strategy to supplement this.

“HAVE OPINIONS BEYOND THE HR REMIT.”

WHY DID YOU MOVE INTO OPERATIONS FROM HR?

I believed I could make a difference and it was an opportunity to test myself. It was also important for the business to give the stores continuity in a period of change because they already knew me. The Operations Board were very strong and could cope with any gaps in my Operations experience. I went into it with humility. It is important to me that B&Q is successful.

WHAT IS YOUR PLAN FOR THE LONG-TERM?

Eventually to get out of corporate life and see my family grow up. I don't see myself in another retailer. I might go into lecturing or sport.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST THING YOU'VE LEARNT DURING YOUR CAREER?

Most people have a positive contribution to make. It's just about finding a way to leverage it. People performance is often a consequence of how they are managed.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

Playing rugby for Wales! In work, I focus more on what I might be able to achieve in the future. I don't look back.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTTO IN LIFE?

“The clock's gone back to zero”. It doesn't matter about the past – it's about looking forwards.

CAREER

2001-present

B&Q – HR Director and Operations Director

1994-2001

Woolworths and Big W – Director of OD

1990-1994

WHSmith – Retail HR Controller

EDUCATION

CIPD

PG Diploma – Management Studies

Oxford Brookes University

Sports Science Degree

Cardiff University

CONTACT



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