

# PRACTITIONER'S VIEWPOINT



## Award-winning practitioner Neil Keeler passes on his tips for making OD work in your organisation

experience only for senior executives. Make it a behaviour. If your CEO doesn't own your OD programme with integrity, and if it's viewed as "an HR thing" then it won't endure the usual state of organisational indifference. Your relationship, proximity and influence with your most senior leaders is critical. You'll likely need them to hear some uncomfortable truths, yet still want to keep you nearby.

### Make your OD fit your organisation.

A handy phrase I've coined for Southend-on-Sea Borough Council is to "estuarise" our work.



### **With the right leadership, right engagement, right strategy and correctly resourced OD programme, you will move performance to new heights**

Our projects need a flavour of the seaside – of salty air and candy floss – to be truly authentic.

### Think about physics.

Your organisation's performance is like a load that needs to be lifted to where you want it to go (your strategy), using the right amount of force (resources).

The lever is your leadership; the strength and length of that lever will enable you to elevate your load to

where you want it. And make sure you're clear on where you wish to place it before you start lifting!

The fulcrum is your employee engagement. If that is high and strong, the arc through which you can lever your performance increases exponentially.

The force applied via that lever is your OD programme. You must ensure the fulcrum doesn't crumble under pressure/force applied. If the lever isn't strong enough, it too could snap.

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### **Culture is the residue of previous success (or failure!), and always risks pulling you back.**

Considering culture on its own is meaningless. Only consider it in the context of your business, your strategy – within your current and anticipated future environments. People with arms crossed looking angry are probably the best help you can get. Resistance takes energy; angry people (usually) care. Culture will not only eat strategy for breakfast, it quickly turns it into the next state by digestion. And while we're talking about food ...

### **There is an 'OD' in 'FOOD', so food in OD really works!**

Tribes commune and interact around food, we are nourished, energised and sensually excited by it. Gifting food to people provokes reciprocation. Every workshop I've reviewed has included comments that "biscuits, cakes, Danish pastries, lunch ..." would have made it better. We really should listen more to our people, shouldn't we? **TJ**

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**D**espite downsizing by a third, reducing budgets, years of frozen pay and increased workloads, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council has not only continued to deliver for our borough, but has an employee engagement culture described as "second to none" by external assessors.

Labelled as "failing" in 2005, we became Council of the Year in 2012, collecting many corporate and service awards along the way.

Being recognised by *Training Journal* in 2016 for our culture change work made me feel incredibly proud.

Here are a few things I have learned; I hope one or two help you.

### **Caring about people is the highest form of leadership integrity, we're all people first.**

Asking questions is the most effective way of challenging and improving performance. Ask your people what could be improved in your organisation – if they trust you, they will tell you. If they don't, then I'd start there.

### **Managers should master coaching in order to become engaging, manage change and achieve better results.**

Coaching shouldn't be an elitist