

## ***The Importance and Implications of Balance, Integrity and Quality to mch: positive impact's Success***

*The following is an edited extract of an article mch's Director, Mark Hughes, wrote for a regional enterprise network in 2008. While the values outlined below have been regularly put to the test, they remain as important to mch today as they did back in 2008.*

Over time, *mch* has developed three core values: balance, integrity and quality. These values inform how *mch* decides what to do and how to do it and the impact of each is outlined below.

### ***Balance***

Not long after founding *mch*, back in 2005, I attended an event on entrepreneurship. One of the speakers closed his talk by putting on his dressing gown. This was to illustrate his view that successful entrepreneurship required you to work in your dressing gown, whether it is working late, rising early or working weekends.

I disagree. In my view, entrepreneurship is successful if it is in balance with the rest of life. While not always easy, it becomes more achievable if balance is considered as important a proxy for success as finance, with metrics to measure and monitor it, just as turnover and operating costs measure a company's financials.

In my case I measure balance by:

- Setting expectations as to what constitutes a working day and compensating myself when expectations are not met
  - An *mch* working day is 8 hours and any time worked over 8 hours is taken *in lieu*
- Managing work to fit around a 4-day week rather than a 5-day week, to enable me to look after my children
  - I have set myself an annual target of being able to do this over 95% of the time
- Working as few weekends as possible
  - While some client work requires weekend working, I have set myself an annual target of working less than 5% of them

### ***Integrity***

A key task I completed before writing this article was to decline a financially lucrative piece of work. A review of the sector in which the 'would be' client wanted to operate showed that existing organisations were already meeting demand. Furthermore, a face-to-face meeting suggested that their provision would not be superior or sufficiently differentiated to be viable.

In addition to the client's viability, there was also the health of this particular part of the charitable sector to consider. I firmly believe in a meritocracy, where only the best charities should survive. Assisting mediocre ones, which are duplicating the services and utilising resources that could be used more effectively, is not something that I would be happy doing. In short, I only aim to take on work if I believe it can make a lasting and positive impact on both the client and the people that depend upon it.

Such integrity is not purely borne out of altruism; it also makes long term business sense: a high calibre portfolio will give potential clients far more confidence in my services than a mediocre one. Successful clients are also more likely to endure and thus become repeat clients.

## **Quality**

Given my views on meritocracy, it is only fair that clients should expect high quality from me.

### Delivering Deliverables

Meeting (and ideally exceeding) client expectations regarding the intrinsic 'end products' they have asked for is an obvious way of providing quality. My experiences as a management consultant with McKinsey & Company and as CEO of a not-for-profit organisation help in producing quality 'end products'. However, continuous learning is also important. I consider what I do to be a profession, and like other professionals I incorporate Continuous Professional Development (CPD) into my planning. Since founding *mch* in 2005, I have averaged over 100 hours per year on my own development.

### Being Responsive

Being able to quickly respond to client requests for help is another way in which I try and provide a quality service. Doing so requires two things. Firstly, it requires making a commitment to operate *mch* at no more than 90% capacity i.e. I should have sufficient hours 'up my sleeve' each week in case clients need my help. Secondly, it requires sufficiently diligent planning to ensure the commitment is maintained. Consequently, weekly, monthly and yearly planning, together with the associated administration and monitoring, is integral to *mch's* operations.

In addition to predicting how long known commitments are likely to take, monthly planning includes reviewing key internet sites, deciding upon networking and personal development events and formulating client development opportunities. Client work plans, together with plans for yearly strategic priorities, are also refreshed.

### Developing Genuine Relationships

Perhaps the most important way of delivering quality in the long term is by developing genuine client relationships – ones where concern and interest exists whether I am engaged in paid work or not. Developing and maintaining such relationships take time however and this is another aspect of *mch's* operations that is planned, monitored and evaluated.

## **The Implications of these Values**

The above values have had significant implications for *mch*. Principally, they have contributed to maintaining *mch* as a single employee company, despite there being sufficient potential work for more staff. Initially, when expansion was considered, recruitment rather than partnership arrangements was viewed the best way of guaranteeing that these values (and thus the *mch* way of doing things) were preserved. Unfortunately, the chances of finding a suitably qualified individual, who was prepared to work for considerably less than they could earn in other sectors, made successful recruitment so unlikely that it was not attempted. While *mch* remains open to the possibility of genuine partnership arrangements, they have to be compatible with all the above values.

Consequently, *mch* is an organisation where 'small and simple' takes priority over growth, and balance, integrity and quality are as important as profit.