

Healthcare manufacturing - A quality move

Lynn Smith turned out to be the perfect solution to what looked, on the face of it, like an intractable problem. An entire factory had to be relocated and quality standards implemented to meet the tough US Military Standard - with a two-month deadline.

If you wanted evidence to contradict the image of interim executives as middle-aged men who have been made redundant and stand little chance of finding another full-time position, then Lynn Smith provides it. Smith, who's 46, is a typical modern interim. After a career in line management, she gave up a permanent job three years ago, attracted by the flexibility and range of challenges that being an interim affords. She combines broad general management experience with a specialisation in quality issues and standards.

Whilst she has substantial technological expertise, she also has a wealth of change management, culture and human resource experience under her belt. Many of the jobs she has done have been a mixture of strategy and execution, for businesses that need advice and specific expertise, but framed in a pragmatic business-orientated context. She calls herself 'a rather unusual hybrid,' but, in truth, she exemplifies the flexibility, adaptability and range of skills that are the hallmark of the modern interim executive.

She turned out to be the perfect solution to what looked, on the face of it, like an intractable problem. Impact Executives received a brief from the telecommunications company Mitel to find an interim executive who could implement the US Military Standard. Mitel owned a business in Sweden, which makes 60 per cent of the world's heart pacemakers. It had decided to switch production to its manufacturing plant in South Wales, and needed to get quality standards up to scratch before a major customer audit. Time was of the essence. Smith had less than two months to effect the transfer of technology, expertise and equipment from Sweden to Wales and to oversee the accompanying culture change. Crucially, she also had to familiarise herself with and implement the tough US Military Standard, a requirement for invasive technology.

People within Mitel were extremely focused on the task at hand, knowing that if they didn't win the customer audit, they would be out of a job. In addition to the knowledge transfer task, Smith had to deal with significant people issues, not least the fall-out from the departure of the previous quality manager. In Lynn Smith's words she explains her approach. "The challenge is to distance yourself from the issues so that you can get on and do the job, while at the same time empathising and engaging with people so that they work with you."

Mitel passed its customer audit, and Smith ended up staying for nine months, helping the business to achieve other standards, including international quality standard ISO 9000 and environmental standard ISO 14000. She also helped to recruit a full-time quality manager to succeed her. "They needed someone who could contribute to business strategy as well as managing the quality department", she says. Managing director, Jim Ryan said: "I wouldn't hesitate to employ Lynn again in any one of a number of roles, not just quality. She achieved everything she set out to achieve, and more besides. She added real value to us.

We brought her in for her specialism in quality where we benefited enormously from her knowledge, but she made a significant contribution to other areas of the business too". What's more, he added, "Smith fitted into the team very quickly, was always very positive, and demonstrated enormous commitment to the role".

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