

BGP Stories from the front-line

Steve Brown on pivotal moments in his business journey

"There's got to be a gap in the market for someone who doesn't actually swear at their customers!" Steve Brown, Founder and MD of Euro Projects recruitment.



On Friday 20th October this autumn's BGP cohort was joined by our second guest speaker in the series, Steve Brown, founder and MD of Euro Projects. Now in its 27th year of operation, Euro Projects, and its sister company EP Executive Search, is a leading player in the recruitment of top-flight engineers. When Steve took part in BGP in 2012 the business

was turning over around £2.5 mn and achieving a net profit of £250,000. Last year the group hit the magic net profit mark of £1 mn, and Steve was back at Cranfield to share his insights on what has made that possible.

Steve didn't choose recruitment, he says: recruitment chose him. Even while he was studying engineering at university he was helping fellow-students find industrial placements. His big opportunity came when he was still a relatively new graduate, working on engineering consultancy assignments funded by European Union money. He found himself informally recruiting and placing people to work on projects, and so Euro Projects recruitment was created, as a spin-off from the parent activity. He was also encouraged to start the business by seeing other recruiters in the sector doing it so badly! Recruitment is probably the single biggest issue faced by ambitious owner-managers, and Steve contributed some outstanding insights from his professional perspective and his own passage to successful growth:

- Skills can always be acquired, but far more important are competencies. He told a moving story of how one candidate rediscovered his self-esteem and purpose through leaving a dead-end job and

bringing seemingly unrelated experiences to a new position, where he has excelled.

- Be clear about where you as a leader add value to your business and beware of recruiting in your own image. Two of you probably won't help your business grow. Instead, recruit high quality people who have strengths where you are weak, and will happily do the things you hate. Steve has progressively unloaded all the things he dislikes onto a very competent PA. His philosophy was once to spend as little as possible on admin overhead. With hindsight, it was a mistake.
- If you are relatively small, hitch your wagon to a rising star and ride their slipstream. In the early days Euro Projects was starved of time and cash. As the online market for recruitment took off, Steve's larger competitors viewed it as a threat and resisted any engagement with internet advertisers. Steve saw this as an opportunity and by cutting a deal gained access to a raft of candidates his firm would never otherwise have had on their books.
- Do everything you can to make yourself redundant. Steve visualises his business as a photocopier operated by his staff. His job is to come into the office and press the green button. After that the machine takes care of itself.

That said, Covid-19 disrupted Euro Projects like most other businesses. Steve became much more hands-on and, true to form, took a different stance from his competitors. Instead of mothballing the company when the market was no longer recruiting, Steve asked how the firm could remain relevant. He organised and delivered a series of on-line seminars providing high-quality advice on managing through the pandemic,

and offered a free recruitment service to firms making protective equipment for the healthcare sector. When it came to his own experience of BGP, probably the biggest value Steve obtained was an insight into the value of networking. Right after the programme he joined a BGP Board of fellow participants and gained an enormous amount from the exchange of ideas and good practice. He pointed out that many great business successes, such as Warren Buffet and Bill Gates, have all taken an active part in mastermind groups. Right now Steve is part of such a group based in the United States and happily trades information about Euro Projects with his American counterparts. As he points out, someone operating a recruitment business out of Austin Texas is not going to pose a competitive threat to a firm in Leicestershire.

Finally, he stressed the value of not getting too comfortable with the status quo. He actively relishes getting into the zone of discomfort and has recently set up a team-building company that teaches executives to master polo in a day. In the process of a new career on horseback he has broken a few bones, but it's all part of the journey as far as Steve's concerned!

To learn more about Euro Projects and EP Executive Search, visit www.europrojects.co.uk

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Euro Projects Recruitment

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