

'Get Lean' says Virgin: and why wouldn't you...

In 2010, Virgin Holidays, led by Head of Business Improvement Sarah Fox, embarked on a mission to identify and implement a new method to effect change across the organisation. With a vision of their objective agreed, Sarah's team looked to the market for a suitable methodology and chose Lean, along with Quantuvis Consulting Ltd to help its delivery during 2011 and 2012...

'We discovered Quantuvis by word of mouth says Sarah Fox, 'did thorough background checks and got them in. That was in 2010 and we haven't looked back.'

Continuing, Sarah describes how, from the start, Quantuvis partners Richard Gill and Marilyn Kershaw understood exactly what she wanted. 'Critically, they understood the complexities of our Industry. They also clearly articulated their understanding of Lean management in our demanding customer service environment.'

Impressed from the beginning

'From the first meeting, we were impressed by how Quantuvis understood the theory *and* practice of implementing Lean. They didn't just walk in, recommend action and leave the implementation to us. At risk of sounding clichéd, they talked the talk and walked the Lean walk from the minute they arrived at our Crawley headquarters.'

With a strategic vision in place, Sarah had to create an in-house Lean team, implement the methodologies and build a solid foundation for future Lean roll out within the business. She needed advice and practical guidance on the best way to achieve the vision, support, tools and techniques.

A carefully-designed programme

Since then, Quantuvis has designed and led a bespoke training programme, done regular mentoring, run catch-up sessions and helped the business improvement team work through challenges they encountered. As well as this,

Quantuvis provided ad hoc change consultancy, helped Sarah's team roll out Lean training to a wider Virgin Holidays audience and supported a Kaizan ('change for the better') team. Three years on, Sarah's world is very different.

'I keep recalling how they offered us a package to deliver Lean management, not just theory and recommendations. I can't over-emphasise their approachability and depth of relevant experience. And their intuitive understanding of our customer service environment.

'When we started to roll out Lean our business improvement team and Quantuvis worked seamlessly together and we were able to draw on examples from *within* our business. As well as supporting in-house buy-in, that enhanced our credibility and re-emphasised how Quantuvis understood our business – in a way that mere theory or generic examples wouldn't have done as well.'

Teething troubles en route to Lean?

Surely, over three years with such a large organisation, there must have been glitches and teething troubles? 'Actually, no,' explains Sarah candidly. 'Not only were Quantuvis knowledgeable, but their customer service also impressed us. Of course there were the usual challenges of getting people to buy into change, but that's a normal reaction that we -

addressed together.'

Nearly three years on, Sarah proudly enthuses about her fully-trained and qualified Lean team. With solid foundations in place, her business improvement team (and the rest of Virgin Holidays) is ready for future expansion of Lean. 'Qualification in Lean and success with putting a toe in the water to roll out Lean more widely has given us new confidence and measurable benefits.'

The benefits

Asked about those quantifiable benefits, it's no surprise that Sarah Fox is guarded. With Virgin such an important player in a very competitive sector, her reticence about clearly measurable benefits is understandable. What she *is* happy to say is that engaging Quantuvis has been justified financially – and substantially.

Positive reactions from stakeholders

So, how have those outside the business improvement team reacted to the changes facilitated by Quantuvis? Sarah enthusiastically reports regularly hearing colleagues using Lean terminology around the office. The methodology

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may not be engrained throughout the 1600-employee business yet, but it's clearly 'under the nails' of the travel giant. As well as their adoption of Lean's language, Sarah describes colleagues' positivity about the methodology and the promise it holds for the future. 'There's genuine enjoyment of its visual management, document output, and the language of change.'

Unhesitating recommendation

And tomorrow? Sarah describes her vision for the future of Lean within Virgin Holidays: our newly qualified team has everything it needs to champion Lean across Virgin Holidays and help reshape the future of our business.'

***'Measurable
financial
benefits'***

No surprise then, that Sarah unhesitatingly recommends Quantuvis. Indeed, she's already done so and the recipients of her recommendation are equally delighted.

Summing up the experience, Sarah Fox quotes her exclamation to Quantuvis partner Marilyn Kershaw at the end of one particularly enlightening Lean session: 'Adopt Lean and work with Quantuvis? Why on earth *wouldn't* you?'

Based on Virgin's experience, it's a challenge with only one logical response for any large or small customer service organisation that wants to start enjoying the benefits of Lean methodologies before their competitors do. ■

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