

No ordinary company, no ordinary submission

By Richard Searle, managing director, BDO, who oversaw the firm's submission for an award

When BDO decided to go for Guernsey's Best Large Business Award, it was clear from the outset that it would have to be a submission with a difference. The entry would need to flag up BDO's uniquely successful position as a locally owned and managed accountancy firm with a worldwide network of resources at its disposal. But just as important it would also have to demonstrate the all-inclusive ethos that supports the firm's most prized asset – its staff.

The decision to enter was made at board level but from then on every single member of BDO's nearly 50-strong workforce was given a say in what should be in the final submission. A core team of 11 representing all levels of seniority, from directors and managers to trainees, was created to put the entry together. Then all the other members of the company were invited and encouraged to say which areas of its success needed to be highlighted to the award judges.

Some of the key criteria for the award were relatively easy for the entry team to address. BDO's general business performance over the last 12 months speaks for itself, with the addition of 111 new clients representing 8.8 per cent of new fees despite the backdrop of an uncertain economic climate. One strong theme emerged from brainstorming sessions: that much of BDO's success, especially as far as the staff are concerned, had come through being a 'big small' company.

For example, audit supervisor Jocelyn Craven-Wilkinson, who was in the core brainstorming group, pointed out that the firm is large enough to provide great variety in work assignments as well as constant challenges while retaining very much a small firm feel.

This was particularly shown by the 'we're all in this together' attitude and approach while significant changes were being introduced in 2011, particularly with a new audit software tool that radically changed the way we work.

After being flagged up with such enthusiasm, the smooth introduction of the new audit tool was highlighted in the submission form. This would not necessarily have happened without all the staff input from bottom to top.

It was a fascinating exercise. I sat in the background and it was extremely rewarding to hear everyone else being so passionate about so many different aspects of the firm's work. When it came to the audit tool everyone in the room was shouting about it. The new system was brought in throughout the BDO network globally in 2011 but we were one of the first firms to introduce it and so this was a truly noteworthy achievement.

BDO's high professional service standards were another area that staff members were keen to see featured in the submission, while the firm's open and inclusive system of management was also highlighted, as audit trainee Aaron Ockleford explained. He said that BDO has an unusually flat management structure and directors' office doors are always open to all members of staff for any queries they may have.

Another of BDO's audit trainee, Caroline Allen singled out the company's student training programme for a strong mention because 'it's a very supportive environment to train in'. Benefits include study leave to attend courses and the managerial team offer great support for all students, she said.

The notable differences in culture between BDO and other large firms are set out clearly in the award submission. Unlike some of its competitors, BDO's policy is to discourage excessive overtime and to encourage a healthy work-life balance. The latest staff survey from June 2011 revealed that more than 95 per cent of employees rated the firm as a good or excellent workplace. Meanwhile turnover rates are extraordinarily low with almost a third of the workforce staying 10 years or more.

For such a well-established and successful island company it may surprise some that BDO has not entered for Guernsey's Best Business before now. However, for the directors and everyone else involved in the entry for 2011 the timing is perfect.

In 2008 we set about a new business plan and over the last few years staying true to the plan and our core values has ensured success and stability in our changing environment.

We have emerged well from that process and the company is now where we wanted it to be. To be chosen as one of Guernsey's best three large businesses is simply confirmation of how far BDO has come in that time. Winning the award would validate the continued hard work of the entire team as recognition of their efforts.

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BDO Limited
Chartered Accountants & Business Advisers

P O Box 180 . Place du Pré . Rue du Pré
St Peter Port . GY1 3LL
Tel : 724561 . Fax : 711657
e mail : mail@bdo.gg
www.bdo.gg

