



A personal plan

Running your own business or managing a department can offer the opportunity of creating a business environment that you find pleasurable to work in – it might even enable others to enjoy the sort of business structure and opportunities that you would have appreciated in past roles.

Certainly, the latter was partly the inspiration for Mike Lloyd (pictured), managing director of ML Electronics, the Salisbury based design consultancy whose electronics expertise is behind projects such as PlasmaJet (see NE 25 April 2006) and The Source, an electronics based art work created by urban artists Greyworld for the London Stock Exchange (see NE 14 Dec 2004).

On returning from an 18month career break spent travelling the world, Lloyd started ML Electronics with his wife Sharon as an opportunity of choosing projects that he wanted to be involved with, as much as possible. An engineer by profession, Lloyd had no formal training in people management and, with a growing business, was beginning to feel overwhelmed by the demands made by clients and staff, as well as the inevitable stresses of dealing with financial planning and business strategy.

It was a case of the business taking over, as Lloyd

A personal development plan is as important as a business plan, as ML Electronic's managing director Mike Lloyd testifies. By **Vanessa Knivett**.

explains: "I was getting drawn into the business and, without realising, lots of things in my life were becoming less important. I think I was close to a nervous breakdown."

A change was clearly needed and it came in the form of an invitation from a friend to a personal development weekend. "Things started to change dramatically from that moment, as I started to understand that everything I needed in life had begun to be

met by the business. That personal development process has continued for the last five years," relates Lloyd.

One of the key starting points was recognising what aspects of the business could be delegated and how. Lloyd has instigated various three to four people teams that are involved in guiding different aspects of the business - such as engineering development, quality management or the office environment.

As well as inviting staff to take ownership and responsibility for guiding various business processes, Lloyd has

encouraged a 'blameless culture', where it is assumed that everyone does their best with the resources available and openness and honesty is respected. He says it isn't a 'can do' environment: "Saying 'no' is OK, when justified."

Meanwhile, Lloyd now sees his role as figurehead for the 17 strong company, as a leader and as a coach. Developing MLE's staff is, as he sees it, integral to the way the business develops as a whole.

It's a constantly evolving process, where staff also contribute ideas. One recent innovation is the 'dreamboard' - a pictorial representation of what employees want to achieve over a period of time, both in their work and personal lives.

Explains Lloyd: "Most people spend a third of their life working, getting to work and preparing for work. If you want it to be fulfilling and fun, then you have to plan it. But the reality is that people spend more time planning their holidays than the thing they spend one third of their time doing for 40 years."

Lloyd has found himself inspired by business coach Tony Robbins and recently attended a workshop aimed at creating an environment that will itself create leaders.

But could an 'empowered' workforce have its downside? Not so, says Lloyd. Employees, all of whom participate in a profit share scheme, recently opted to set a target of growing the business by 500% in the next three years – far higher than the target that Lloyd himself expected. And with staff encouraged to contribute ideas, important improvements to business processes have resulted.

Another marker, staff turnover, seems to suggest a focus on personal development has led to an attractive business culture at MLE. So far, just one employee has left in the company's 11 years. Lloyd concludes: "The business performs better if people are excited about what they do." 