

Dental supplies business takes advantage of funded wrap around skills support to develop a high performing workplace

Silsden-based wholesaler for dental instruments and hygiene products, Swallow Dental Supplies, worked closely with training provider Pro-Development to develop their management team, engage employees and uplift the business in times of growth and change. Taking advantage of **Higher Performing Workplaces** funding to access a comprehensive skills solution.



“Swallow Dental Supplies genuinely care and are invested in their people. Because they’ve invested in all the right things, it’s had a really positive impact on them becoming a high performing workplace.”

In 2020 the dental industry was shut down for a couple of months, but Swallow Dental Supplies adapted its PPE product range and are now growing rapidly through their sales of bone regeneration material and other surgical

dental supplies. The business has recently been bought by Swedish company Lifco and their MD, Paul Harrison, is beginning the process of retirement.

In his process of stepping away to retire, Paul has seen potential in the management team to run the business and manage the 24 staff. We spoke to Annie Kilburn, Finance Manager at Swallow Dental Supplies, about their leadership journey and how training provider Pro Development has supported the business through this growth and change.

Annie – *“We got to know Pro Development through a free consultation in May through the Strategic Growth Programme. This led to multiple funded interventions through Higher Performing Workplaces.”*

Michelle Mook (Owner/Director, Pro Development) – *“Paul saw lots of potential in Annie and Ben Harrison (Office Manager at Swallow Dental Supplies), so this was a great opportunity to develop core talent in the business to help lead and manage going forward. He wanted to invest in them and support them through that journey.”*

Pro Development’s support began with an Employee Engagement Programme, which involves an employee survey and helps SMEs to develop a ‘people plan’ through various actions.

Annie – *“Pro Development’s actions came naturally and really fitted in to what we wanted to do within the business. We’ve seen the difference the survey has made already, there has been a change in atmosphere and an uplift in energy.”*

Michelle – *“Swallow Dental Supplies have been amazing at implementing the actions identified in their Employee Engagement Programme. They genuinely want to do the right thing so the programme easily fits into their everyday routine.”*

Annie and Ben have been benefitting from Pro Development's experiential Inspiring Leadership programme, as well as workshops and coaching sessions. Swallow Dental Supplies has also utilised Higher Performing Workplaces funding towards coaching for two members of Annie's team. Annie told us how the human approach of coaching, compared to classroom training, has been useful for her team members' confidence and has noticed a difference in both team members already.

Nearing the end of her own experiential leadership learning, Annie has a lot of praise for the programme.

Annie - *"It has felt unforced and I don't have to remind myself to do the things we've learned; it just comes naturally now. It's been a lot of fun but also a great opportunity for self-awareness and self-evaluation with someone there who has the knowledge on how to change things for the better. The coaching has been a privilege as it has felt like career counselling and, when coupled with the leadership programme, it has helped me to become more confident."*

Michelle – *"The beauty of experiential learning is that Annie and Ben have been physically learning about leadership but in a fun way, meaning the knowledge embeds easily and transitions are smoother. Experiential learning is a great opportunity to observe other leaders and see what works and what doesn't and offer each other feedback."*



Annie and Ben also participated in a session for a group of managers, which looked at conflict, style of communication and how they work together. The Building Teams for the Future workshop aims to make a more consistent management team with trust and healthy conflict.

Annie – *"Being more honest with each other and having the conversations we've had has helped massively. This means that the non-managerial staff now have more trust in the management team and this extinguishes any 'us and them' culture. It's shown us how a management team getting it right can change the culture in the business as well."*

Swallow Dental Supplies are continuing to grow and are currently recruiting. They recently expanded into new premises but are already outgrowing these with plans to expand their current offices. Their next steps with the **Higher Performing Workplaces** funding will be to take the employee engagement survey again to measure the success of Pro Development's interventions.

Annie – *"The funding made the amount of support received possible, compared to what we could have invested in without. Pro Development are a very 'human', personable, small business. Their culture and the way they conducted the training has really helped. Coping with the changes Swallow Dental Supplies has gone through in the last 12 months has been made easier by the fact that Ben and I feel better equipped as managers, thanks to the training. We're now able to guide others through change and reassure our staff."*

Higher Performing Workplaces is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and managed by the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges. Eligible businesses can receive 40% ESF funding towards the cost of any HPW training. Eligible businesses must be based in one of the following districts: Bradford, Calderdale, Craven, Harrogate, Kirklees, Leeds, Selby, Wakefield or York.