



RISKY BUSINESS

DAVID T BINKS

Recent events have thrown the need for businesses to assess their risk into sharp relief; **David T Binks** offers advice

All businesses, whether one-man start-ups or national companies with hundreds of staff, have their ups and downs. How a business reacts to these 'bumps in the road' can have a profound effect on its development and future success.

When something doesn't go to plan, it is all too easy to play the blame game, with people pointing the finger in a bid to absolve themselves of any responsibility. However, it is when things go off script that weaknesses within a business present themselves and provide a platform to improve systems and procedures. In relation to this, an apt 'initialism' is the 'Five Ps' – Perfect Planning Prevents Poor Performance.

Applying the 'prevention is better than cure' ethos, it is worth spending some time identifying what the possible weaknesses are within the business you work at. By analysing potential shortcomings or issues, you can begin to put measures in place that will de-risk your business should they occur. In essence, you can build a

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suite of risk assessments for the everyday running of your operation – these don't need to be confined strictly to the health and safety file.

I appreciate that this all sounds very dry, but the upside to thinking this way is that it enables you to confidently impart responsibility to other team members, as robust procedures will be in place to cover pretty much any eventuality. As you would with a conventional health and safety risk assessment, you look at the likelihood of an event occurring, the impact it would have on



your organisation, what you can do to mitigate it – and then what the outcome would be. For example, you could look at something as simple as the age of the vehicles you have within your business and whether they pose a risk to your operations; this risk could then be moderated with regular vehicle inspections and a servicing programme, which would hopefully help to identify any issues before they occur.

This process can then be taken beyond looking at internal issues. It is worth analysing what could externally threaten the success of your business; a simple framework to help explore potential external influences is PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental). For example, a pertinent issue under the 'Environmental' heading would be the current Xylella crisis and the impact it might have on your business. In line with this, you would want to identify measures you could put in place to control this risk, such as looking at your supply chain, deciding whether to only use stock with UK provenance, speaking with the APHA, and ensuring that all plants (if not

from the UK) have plant passports. Implementing a process to control and measure your company's actions will aid decision making and define the direction you want your business to take. Looking at internal factors could be regarded as a potentially short-term focus, while exploring external factors looks to futureproof your organisation in the long-term.

It is important to note that you will only get out of this process what you put into it – this analysis of your business serves as a snapshot at the time you conduct it, so revisiting your risk assessments biannually is a must; not only can this help to identify possible threats, it also makes you more aware of the possible opportunities going forward.

ABOUT DAVID T BINKS

David T Binks is managing director of Cheshire-based Landstruction, which was set up in 2010 and now has 40 employees. It has won Gold medals at RHS Chelsea and RHS Tatton Park. David also launched the Big Hedge Co., which supplies and installs mature hedging and topiary nationwide.
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