

STAFFING

Leasing is in need of more innovation and experienced staff

Derek Soper

As we hear about the shortages hitting the leasing industry once again, funding getting more severe, lesser-quality credits having to scramble a bit more vigorously for their facilities, and less enthusiasm from venture capital providers, there is one shortage that I believe is more serious than all the rest – quality people.

The recent concern from many parts of the industry that there is a severe shortage of good quality candidates for the many jobs on offer is disturbing. It doesn't seem so long ago that I read with fascination a piece in "The Eye", written, it seemed to me, with great enthusiasm, about a survey of senior executives in the leasing industry.

It lauded the average age of many recent appointments being substantially lower than that we have seen over the past few years. It reported that "this new blood represented a transformation of the industry with new ideas, renewed focus and different ways of working". The suggestion seems to be that the average age of the senior executives can come down, but with no apparent loss of knowledge or experience to our industry –

the word 'tosh' comes to mind.

I wonder if there is a connection between the need for young blood to learn the various aspects of the business coupled with the lack of candidates, and the burning ambition to be top dog before learning the basics of running a company.

Surely we haven't reached a situation where the 40-something chief executive thinks that he or she will learn nothing new between 40 and 60. It would be sad, indeed, if that were the case. To feel that one's career 'tops out' at 40 is to be as self deluded as thinking that 40 is the age to try for the 10-second 100 metres.

The more problematical issue for the leasing industry is that the falling age of the new generation of leasing leaders is not by design, but more as a result of the downgrading of the leasing business within banking groups to one of 'product' rather than 'alternative business'. Measured by portfolio size, profit contribution, market penetration or any other factor; the fact is that banks are increasingly managed by numbers and processes rather than innovation or customer service.

Many banks are frightened by doing something new, or employing different kinds

of people, and instead prefer to hide behind being one of the crowd.

It is sad to see the erosion of personal service being replaced by systems-driven processes managed by faceless people with no mandate to deal sensibly with customers.

Our leasing industry was founded on customer service and innovation. Where will it come from in the future? I hope the growth of the independent and captive will answer that question. What will then happen, also learning from historical habit, is that the banks will try to buy them to add more turnover, go through the process of integration, take away the real reason for the success, which is usually the people, and the circle continues.

While we have some of our leasing industry still intact, let's inject as much innovation as we can, both via technology and product, delivery and service, thus showing the banks the way to success. This is a people business. Let's go out and find the quality staff and train them well; that way we will have less concerns for the future health of the industry.

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