

Russell Dalton, Finance and Business Director, Persnore High School, Worcestershire, and ISBL Fellow

Can you provide us with an example of your excellent practice in Marketing (income generation) and LSS (leadership)?

Prior to starting my current role, I had a full and varied career in the Army. I 'retired' in 2005 having gained the position of Regimental Sergeant Major, the highest appointment a non-commissioned soldier can gain. My 23 years of military life taught me many lessons that I have been able to bring into the role of school business management, not least of all flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to take calculated risks. Since leaving the Army I have worked at Persnore High School in Worcestershire and, along with my business team, support several primary schools. When I arrived at the school it was in a deficit situation, and through a lot of hard work and introducing new systems, policies, and practices we could start to balance the books. I have also been very lucky in securing funding to enable the school to significantly develop its facilities which has kept me extremely busy over the 12 years! Along with this, I have been credited as the driving force in converting the school to academy status in 2011. As part of my journey and for supporting myself in the role, I have completed the CSBM, DSBM and ADSBM. My knowledge, qualifications and experience in combination have enabled me to work previously as an SBM Advocate for the NCTL and more recently as a ISBL Associate Practitioner. The latter enables me to assist in driving the Association and the profession to even higher standards. I also helped form the local business management network in Worcestershire, which I now proudly chair and where I had the privilege of being nominated for the SBM of the Year in 2011, where I was runner up. I regularly work in an advisory capacity at both local and national level and I am an avid advocate of collaborative working. I am now working with a steering group to build on the current collaborative work our school does by forming a Multi Academy Trust.

An area of excellent practice that I would like to highlight is that of income generation. I have been in post since 2005 and it was very evident from the outset that I would need to be entrepreneurial in order to balance the school budget. The school was in deficit and there was no desire to restructure the staffing or make cuts elsewhere, therefore the only answer was to generate more income. As part of my performance management targets, I set an income target, it is amazing how focused you can be when you do this!

My first experience of commercial development involved moving the catering function 'in house' 3 months after starting at the school. Not knowing too much about the catering industry I needed to carry out plenty of research and ground work to enable me to write a business plan. The business soon exceeded the goals set out in the modest business plan and the business now turns over six figure sums with a profit margin of approximately 15%. I soon ventured into many other areas, looking at services we could offer and how the schools' resources could be used in a business sense. Trading has now grown to a level where I have needed to form a subsidiary limited company. The vision is to turn over our first £1m in the very near future! This success has seen me write articles and be invited to present at conferences to help guide others with similar ambitions.

Strategically I use my commercial insight to help shape the organisational strategy, bringing a view from outside teaching and learning allows me to challenge and shape thinking to develop the school even further. Being a fully integrated member of the senior leadership team, I engage with, and challenge, other senior leaders to ensure that changes that would result from the SDP will benefit the school.

I am also passionate about collaboration, and my leadership skills enable an inclusive and innovative approach which allows wider collaboration thus developing the ability to respond to new opportunities and challenges. However, I do not have the monopoly on good ideas; therefore, I actively encourage input from the other members of the team. This gives a sense of ownership and belonging which enables standards to be driven higher and sustainability in the development of the school.

What do you feel the ISBL Fellowship shows about you and your practice?

The hard work and dedication that has been required to generate the income has been recognised in many ways, but probably the most rewarding is the award of ISBL Fellowship.

What does Fellowship mean to you, your school and the wider sector?

When I left school I truly underachieved and since then I have worked very hard to make up for it. Receiving the Fellowship gives me a great sense of pride that, as a professional, I have been recognised for what I contribute, not just within my school but to the profession as a whole. This isn't the end of my development, far from it, and I would like to think that I can inspire others to achieve also.

For my school, not only does ISBL Fellowship mean I am recognised for my hard work, and the time and energy I have invested, but also that they have a senior leader who is a driving force to bring better outcomes for young people. As soon as my Headteacher was informed of my Fellowship achievement, he informed the press, which has also highlighted for the school that we employ quality staff.

The ISBL Fellowship is also widely recognised, as I have gained much praise from members of other organisations, suppliers and partners for gaining the fellowship. As a result of that recognition, there is a renewed confidence in the professionalism I can bring to the wider sector.

How does ISBL Fellowship support your professional development?

I have always taken my professional development seriously. Having come into the profession with very few business management qualifications I have worked to gain Level 4, 5 and 6 qualifications and a vast amount of knowledge and experience. The Fellowship adds a new dimension but is not the end of the journey!

What are the main benefits of Fellowship, and why do you think others should apply?

One thing that I haven't mentioned already is the overriding sense of pride in the achievement I have gained. This recognition is the result of my dedication and hard work, and to receive it makes it all worthwhile. I would actively encourage others to apply so they too can be recognised and have the feeling of self-pride that I now have as a result of the award.