

Andrew.Stewart

talent management in a small business



Auckland firm Andrew.Stewart was established in 2002 by directors Aaron Andrew and Duncan Stewart, to provide high quality, value for money resource management consulting services to local government infrastructure managers, corporate clients and private landowners.

Andrew.Stewart now has 16 staff working alongside the directors and clients. While this growth has been exciting and profitable, its dizzying pace has meant internal systems must be top notch to ensure the smooth running of the business. And, with a relatively small staff, great recruitment is imperative.

Director Duncan Stewart speaks about how Sonar6 has met, and exceeded, his requirements for talent management in a small professional services business with big ideas and strong growth. They also use the solution to help with recruitment.

Environmental Factors

"Aaron and I came from large corporate consulting engineering firms, and by the time we left we both felt pretty disenfranchised. There wasn't any one specific issue; it's just that it wasn't a particularly personal environment to work within. That's not what we wanted for our business," Duncan says.

"When we set up, we wanted to establish a genuine team culture as an underpinning. That's the environment we wanted to work in and how we wanted the firm to develop.

In a small company, each person is vital to the success of the firm. Larger organisations may be able to afford to 'carry' a less than ideal employee, but in a small company, one poor performer can have devastating effects.

That said, when directors are busy working in a company and the scale is such that there are not dedicated departments for HR, accounts etc, it can be hard to find the time and develop the skills needed to make sensible talent decisions.

This can lead to an ad-hoc approach to performance reviews, recruitment and generally ensuring the right people are in the right jobs doing the right things. For Andrew.Stewart, this is where Sonar6 provided invaluable support.

Requirements

Andrew.Stewart needed a system tailored to their requirements that could grow as the business did and that would help ensure consistency and quality in talent management practices.

"Sonar6 literally forced us to sit down and explain exactly what sort of organisational talent profile we wanted – so they could deliver the right system for us. That process, of having to work out and be able to explain precisely what we needed, was key to ensuring an effective solution," Duncan says.

"It really forces you to prioritise what you want for your company, so it's not just another administrative hassle; it makes a huge contribution to planning and success."

And because Sonar6 work with their customers, rather than simply selling and installing an off-the-shelf, one size fits all product, then as long as you can tell them what you need, they can deliver it, he adds.

"Our people are our business. We sell our knowledge and skills - not a product - so having the right people in the right roles is everything. But as we grow, we need to make sure we don't lose our people culture as it is one of

Results

On growing with the company:

"When you're growing fast, it's especially easy to lose sight of your business' core values. Sonar6 helps us to stick to our founding principles, and constantly measure our success against them."

On recognising and managing talent:

"Sonar6 works in both recruiting new staff and in developing those already with us. The bonus is that it's all in one system so we can see, and manage, the team as a whole."

our founding principles," Duncan Stewart says.

"Our HR systems also have to be easy to use because we're not HR experts. They need to be efficient and have tangible outcomes. The great thing about Sonar6 is that is just what it delivers. With the click of a button we can literally see a picture of our team, what skills and talent we have in place and where we need to develop," he says.

Sonar6 Solution

Performance reviews:

Duncan Stewart says the firm now uses Sonar6 to conduct all performance reviews. The employee sits with the directors throughout the process and they follow the HR criteria on screen.

"Obviously we have it on solo mode so they can't see other people's information. We work our way through and use each factor as a point of discussion," he says. "It makes the system streamlined, effective and consistent across the company. We cover a lot of territory in these discussions, and this in turn leads to a more meaningful performance assessment for all parties."

He says being able to map all employees on the one system lets him and fellow director, Aaron Andrew, identify any gaps within their workforce and areas where people may need extra development.

Recruitment:

The firm has also learnt to use the software when undertaking recruitment of new staff.

"We interview the candidates and then feed the information into the Sonar6 software. It's brilliant because we get an instant picture of where they may fit in the team," Duncan says. "We ensure that our interview questions are aligned with the Sonar6 profile we are seeking to evaluate."

"We developed a strong allergy to recruitment consultants early on, so we use Sonar6 to reinforce our

On the true meaning of partnership:

"Sonar6 has proven to be genuinely open to feedback and as a result, a far more collaborative approach has evolved in our dealings with the company. They've said to us, 'OK it's working – but what else do you want it to do?' Then they've gone off and figured out how to deliver an even better solution. That's partnership."

Implementation of Sonar6 has allowed Andrew Stewart's directors to focus on their core business. They are confident they now have the tools and systems in place to identify and recruit the best possible workforce and to ensure everyone is appropriately deployed, well supported and has their professional development needs met.

The firm is still growing and it's a plus for Duncan Stewart that the Sonar6 Talent Management solution will keep growing with them.

candidate selection process, without having to rely on the often variable performance of consultants."

Ongoing feedback and development:

After every round of performance reviews, Duncan and Aaron present feedback to Sonar6 to ensure the software is constantly evolving and meeting the changing needs of the firm.

"Sonar6 has a truly collaborative approach with clients, which enables both parties to identify and make development suggestions. They have also taken the time to really understand our business; they understand what we need and welcome our feedback," Duncan says.

It's fair to say that Duncan Stewart is a Sonar6 fan:

"It's a straightforward system, tailored to our requirements so what more could we want?"

"It assists with our two biggest talent issues – recruitment and performance reviewing."

"It's very visual and experiential which makes the whole process easier, clearer and more enjoyable"

"I think it would work well in any organisation with buy in from the top"

"The results speak for themselves; we have only lost one professional staff member in five years – that is an astounding track record, and one that is unparalleled in our industry as far as I am aware. Sonar6 was key to helping us achieve this, and has saved us a staggering amount of time and money that would normally need to be spent on addressing staff churn."