

Prima Electronic Services

Leadership Development - High Tech Engineering

01 Background

Prima Electronic Services is a leading contract electronics manufacturer specialising in high reliability printed circuit board assemblies (PCBAs) and full product assembly. The business has a heritage which spans 30 years and had experienced relatively slow growth over that period. Following the acquisition of the business in August 2018 by Nick Russel, a more aggressive growth strategy was to be developed.

At the core of the new owner's strategy is the German Mittelstand philosophy which, amongst other things, places a high value on investment in the workforce, innovation, collaboration and continuous improvement. Nick, as Prima's new Chairman, recognised the need for new talent to join the organisation to propel Prima forward and his first hire was a relatively inexperienced but high potential production manager - Claire Woods.

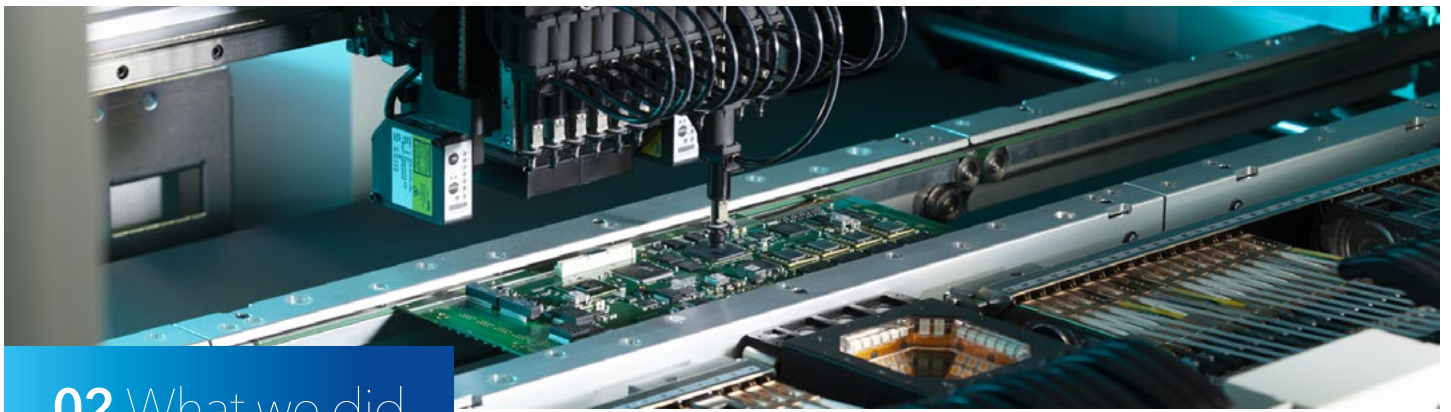
After Claire joined Prima a series of challenges emerged including the

lack of a clear organisational structure, poor documentation of processes and systems and a team culture that had been heavily reliant on direction from the previous owners of the business, which was now manifesting as a lack of ownership and individual accountability. It was clear that a transformational change would be required if the Chairman's ambitious growth targets were to be achieved.

Intramezzo had first worked for the Chairman in 2014, when we were appointed initially to find a Chief Engineer for the Chairman's sister company, Denchi Group, based in Scotland. This was followed by a further appointment of a new COO supported with an onboarding programme and a leadership development programme in 2019. Intramezzo then worked to provide in depth cultural analysis and the development of the Denchi Top Team. As such, Intramezzo had earned 'trusted advisor' status.

"...You don't have to aim for perfection to do a good job - understanding of that has helped me tolerate different levels of expectation in others."

CLAIRE WOODS, OPERATIONS DIRECTOR,
PRIMA ELECTRONIC SERVICES



02 What we did

Our first step was to assess the potential of the recently appointed Production Manager, Claire Woods, to understand whether she could quickly take the step into a broader operational role to effect change, or whether additional leadership would need to be recruited.

The Chairman was also concerned with the present team dynamics and certain cultural issues that appeared to be hindering organisational performance. He wanted this assignment to provide deep insight into the current psychological state of the business so that leadership performance could be rapidly accelerated.

During the first phase, Intramezzo used their Change and Transformation Team to assess Claire's leadership approach and the organisational culture. The range of work included using Occupational Psychologists to conduct leadership profiling, behavioural symptom analysis interviews and a values mapping exercise; the purpose was to identify and separate the driving and resisting forces for change. Having done this, Intramezzo created a Leadership Development Programme to kick start the transformation.

The task was then to identify a coaching approach that would ensure that Claire would be able to quickly build an authentic leadership brand capable of shaping a culture of collaborative team innovation that would convincingly increase business performance.

The Chairman was concerned that

the proposed coaching intervention presented a high level of risk. Intramezzo was able to manage this risk by using our search and selection capability to present the Chairman with a short list of Executive Coaches to de-risk the project by ensuring a coaching experience that would overcome the multi-level resistance. Intramezzo facilitated 'test' coaching sessions so that Claire could select her preferred coach; Claire described this as highly empowering and engaging - it had the effect of fast tracking the process of change.

From the outset, Claire was coached within a 'safe space' to help her explore and raise awareness of what had created the 'steady state' performance for the business. She was able to identify her strengths and a pathway to an authentic leadership style, capable of supercharging the business growth strategy.

A fundamental outcome of Claire's coaching was to create and sustain trust with the operational team. As a relatively recent graduate, Claire had feelings of 'imposter syndrome' and felt awkward revealing her vulnerabilities. During the early coaching sessions, all of which took place off site, Claire was challenged to face up to her perceptions and, through a careful balance of challenge and support, she quickly broke through this barrier. Her coach helped her identify a range of alternative new

behaviours that she was able to test and embed within the team, which enabled Claire to rapidly gain their trust.

As the coaching progressed, Claire was given the space to unpack her typical preferences, that of being the expert and hardworking person, who would normally do the work. Her coach enabled her to see options for delegating more effectively and this led to an acceleration of the overall change effort. Not only did she delegate more, but the operational team were quick to respond positively due to the increasing levels of trust and clarity being demonstrated.

Claire's coach helped build confidence by pointing out the obvious - in previous roles, she had experienced disciplinarian managers / leaders and so felt she was, to some extent, living in the shadow of previous managers. The latter part of the coaching enabled further awareness of her impact on others. So, using a 'a step by step' process Claire developed a braveness to progressively try and test new ways of leading. She was asked "what's the worst that could happen?" She came to quickly realise that she was in a safe place and so could face her truth with greater confidence. She was able to complete her new authentic leadership brand by knowing that she was already successful in leading and could hold a balanced concern for results and people by applying a coaching approach to problem solving.



03 The Outcome

Claire successfully created a new authentic leadership brand which had at its core, a preference of taking a step back and utilising coaching to solve problems and make decisions.

Within the first few months of coaching starting Claire was promoted to Operations Director. People were totally accepting of her new role because she was straight away in the driving seat, demonstrating referent and expert power.

Prima Electronic has realised transformational change in response to Claire's new leadership brand, and in a very short period of time her authentic

leadership has enabled a high volume of change projects.

Claire is not complacent and knows that change often has plateaus and false horizons, but she has at her core, the certain understanding that her role is not to be the expert but instead to coach others to success. Claire now has a genuine very high concern for both business performance and the whole team - and this is reflected by their regard for her, because she is seen as someone who will take good care of people and the organisation.

Claire was able to gain high levels of momentum with the newly created

high performance team by focusing on critical key projects, processes and customers. Within the first six months, Claire led the operations team to build a growth pipeline.

This illustrates how using a Leadership Development Programme can result in significant business benefits and lay the foundations for a long-term team solution - providing there is an understanding to get the approach right from the outset; that is to identify the cultural issues and the authentic leadership style required.

“Although it was clear from the recruitment process and her initial introduction into the business that Claire had the potential to perform as a leader at a very high potential, it was not clear that Claire herself realised her true potential. The feedback from Intramezzo's psychometric profiling process followed by the coaching program quickly changed Claire's perception of herself and acted as a counterweight to previous negative leadership styles Claire had witnessed. She is now leading a programme of transformational change at Prima which is already reaping benefits and it has been very satisfying to see existing and new team members growing with her and supporting this process.”

NICK RUSSEL, CHAIRMAN, PRIMA ELECTRONIC SERVICES

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