

Loyal, focused and great fun: The winning ways of Lesley

There comes a time when every unsung hero deserves to take centre stage. That moment came for Plymouth Chamber of Commerce's operations manager, Lesley Allinson, in November when she was named The Western Morning News Business Awards' Employee of the Year, writes **Catherine Barnes**



"Lesley is a huge pleasure to work with and is by some considerable distance the best employee that has ever worked for me in my career spanning 30 years and six different organisations," Plymouth Chamber of Commerce chief executive David Parlbay said in fulsome praise of a woman for whom it's second nature to go above and beyond the call of duty.

The self-effacing mum of two joined the chamber seven years ago and initially began her career there as David's PA. Since then, she has studied in her own time to achieve a wealth of qualifications – ranging from health and safety and finance to an NVQ Level 7 in management – and was promoted to become office manager, before assuming her current role.

Lesley credits David for a supportive approach which has seen both her and many of her colleagues realise their potential and develop their careers.

It's probably not too far off the mark to describe Lesley as David's right and left hand woman, however: "I never have to check whether she has done something, more frequently she has to remind me

of the things I need to do," he says.

"She is not afraid to tell me when I have made – or am about to make – a mistake and better to tell me what I should do instead.

"To date she has a 100% record of success in helping me make better decisions."

Lesley says: "I come from a customer service background and I don't like keeping people waiting."

It's fair to say that Lesley has had a varied career since leaving school to become a hairdresser – which she did for five years. A six-year period managing a betting shop followed, then three years working in administration at an Army base in Germany, a stint in Kent on an enquiries desk with TSB, then two years in Germany again, this time as a school secretary.

"I've always seen what comes up and been lucky to have been in the right place at the right time," she says. "What I love about my job is the variety, there's never two days the same."

In 2012, the Chamber hosted an event-packed four-day visit for a 20-strong party of guests from Plymouth Massachu-



Above: Plymouth Chamber of Commerce's operations manager, Lesley Allinson collects her Employee of the Year awards and, top left, pictured with colleague Morven Maclean with whom she undertook a 15,000ft skydive to raise funds for Cornwall charity Wild Futures

setts. With the guests due to set off for home early on a Sunday morning, Lesley took it upon herself to drive into Plymouth to see them off from their hotel and saying a final farewell on behalf of the Chamber and of Plymouth.

"This small but significant act was extremely well appreciated by our American guests, which Lesley simply treated as part of what she does," said David.

"Clock watching is not for Lesley," he adds. "She'll only finish her day's work when she has completed the tasks she needs to do in readiness for the following day and is extremely efficient and reliable."

"I often receive emails from her written after 8pm on a weekday evening about work matters."

But Lesley still finds plenty of time for family life and outside interests.

Efficiency and career-focus aside, Lesley also has an infectious sense of fun that makes her a pleasure to work – and network – with.

Last summer, she motivated colleagues to adopt healthier habits, such as cutting down

on down on coffee and taking a lunchtime walk, by taking part in both the Business Health Network challenge the Herald's loveLIFE campaign.

Leading by example, she jumps in with both feet – she and colleague Morven Maclean hurled themselves out of an aeroplane dressed as monkeys in a 15,000ft sky dive last February to raise money for Looe-based primate charity Wild Futures.

"She has a brilliant sense of humour," says David. "There is a lot of laughter in the chamber offices and it is generally led by Lesley."

While her award win – in a category sponsored by Cornwall College Business – came as no surprise to the many friends she has made through her career, Lesley herself was completed taken aback by her nomination.

As for the awards night itself: "I felt couldn't breathe," she said. "And when they called my name I was in shock."

"There are lots of people out there who work hard and are not recognised, so it's lovely to be recognised for what you do."

Exploring the saving graces of 'rescuing' a business from administration

You will often hear the term "rescue" used about insolvent businesses. This usually involves the business actually going into administration and a number of the staff being laid off, the bank is left being owed a lot of money and so are a number of creditors.

You may have been one of those creditors who has lost out and actually the term "rescue" probably really annoys you. The business has carried on with the same directors at the same premises and most of the same staff. In fact it probably has a similar or identical name as it did before.

Why is this allowed to happen and perhaps even more so why do we, licenced insolvency practitioners, seem to help facilitate it?

BUSINESS MATTERS

Lisa Thomas, an insolvency practitioner at Plymouth-based Neville & Co looks at why rescue recoveries are sometimes deemed the best approach to take when a business becomes insolvent



The Enterprise Act of 2002 introduced a faster process for administrations. In the old days (pre 2002) we had to go to court and have a hearing before a judge to put a company into administration. It meant a lot of pre-work and also a lot of legal costs which meant really only larger businesses could afford to do it. In addition I think the UK government at the time wanted to mirror the Chapter 11 rescue procedures of the USA (although in those cases the com-

pany is protected with the existing directors still running it).

Since 2002 administration can be applied for much more quickly and in fact if there is no bank debenture it can happen on the same day (or the same day with the bank's consent). So it is a quick process and it does protect a limited company or a partnership. No one can then remove any assets, enforce security or take any legal action. It really is a

very effective freezing order.

So coming back to "rescue" what we mean by that term is the trade is usually saved together with some of the staff and usually quite a lot of the infrastructure of the existing business. The shell that the business was in (the limited company) is left behind and sorted out afterwards.

Even the business name can be used again if certain legal hurdles are complied with. We recently dealt with a very small business in terms of asset value. It was an internet based retailer selling toys online. Although the business had sales of one million it didn't actually own much. It bought what it needed to sell and was based from someone's home. In the old days we could never have used an adminis-

tration to help the business as it only had assets with a total value of £12,000.

The directors had found someone local who wanted to take the business on and employ the old directors as well and keep the old business trading name. If they had closed and gone into liquidation the business would have lost its continuity and also the website would have closed. Nothing would have been left to "rescue" or save. By using a pre-pack administration we had the assets valued, advertised for sale and sold to the new owner within ten days of first meeting the directors.

There are other ways of saving a business – in particular a Company Voluntary Arrangement can be very useful when the existing busi-

ness is in trouble but has to keep going e.g. because it has established work certification and qualifications that would take years to regain or insolvency would cause the breach of certain contracts.

Rescue is not just limited to industrial type businesses it can apply to law firms, estate agents or in fact just about any business.

If you feel anything in this article has raised any questions please feel free to get in touch with us.

NEVILLE & CO

If you, or someone you know needs advice or guidance, contact Lisa Thomas on 01752 786800