

Mr Lester Biddle, FIH

Leadership has always been of keen interest to me and something I have studied and developed over many years in a Management role. I am fascinated by what make people follow others and how effective Leadership can influence and persuade others to take a course of action. I have applied my own leadership strategies in many different ways in order to achieve a goal or task. I have strong emotional intelligence and am able to gauge people very well, understanding what is motivating them or driving them. Using this knowledge enables me to get the best out of people, by engaging with influence and motivation that deliver results.

As a founding member of HIT Training, I was one of the few people who started the company. The skills and knowledge acquired during this process of building a business from scratch to one of the top 10 Training Providers in the UK, has been exceptional. I have had to learn how to deal with setback after setback, whilst building a diverse team. I have been required to make quick decisions when faced with uncertainty and challenges. I was able to sustain heavy growth in the early years, whilst balancing the quality and operational side of the business to ensure the growth was manageable and sustainable in the long term. Above anything else I learnt the importance of resilience and have used these skills ever since, enabling me to deal with stressful situations in a calm and efficient manner.

One of the key areas I had to develop in the early stages of HIT Training, which remains with me to this day is effective networking and stakeholder engagement. I had to build networks and relationships from nothing and make them into long standing relationships. I have been able to secure a robust network of stakeholders, to ensure I have access to external influence, when I am planning my business needs. Recently, I was involved in a collaborative bid for some ESF funding. This required negotiation and planning skills to ensure we would be able to meet the needs of the contact and comply with the funding rules. In the past, I have been a prime and a sub-contractor on ESF funded projects. I also am a board member for my local LEP (Solent) this requires me to work with the strategic plan and local businesses to inform policy and help the LEP achieve their goals and targets.

I have full Profit and Loss responsibility for the business units in my region, which total 8 in number, delivering Apprenticeships to the value of £10m. I have to write the forecasts and model the delivery pattern, based on the allocations awarded. I review the financial model each month using KPI's based on a set of balanced business needs and produce quarterly results based on my predictions. I am used to delivering within a 5% tolerance level. This involves me managing my teams and the business, taking interim steps and making strategic decisions based on information and data analytics to ensure I deliver on target.

Over my years in Apprenticeship delivery, I have been involved in strategic area reviews, consultation groups on funding levels, with Sector Skills Councils and more recently on the Trailblazer groups, looking at the new standards.

Over the last 20 years I have developed and acquired a really strong understanding of Apprenticeships and fully endorse everything they stand for, having come from a YTS scheme myself many years ago. Apprenticeships are great for business and also for the sustainable development of young people. With the introduction of Degree Apprenticeships, this opens up a new line of academic attainment that has not been available before. I am very excited by this opportunity for young people, as it is creating a new path to a degree and opens up new opportunities for companies.

I am naturally a self starter who enjoys the challenge and working at a quick pace and setting the direction. This is something that has been confirmed to my, not only from peer and colleague feedback, but also from an assortment of diagnostic tools I have used to gauge a better understanding about myself and my work capabilities.