

THE RIGHT DIRECTION



**An interview with Andie Chessun
Founder / Managing Director, Humidity Matters**

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Introduction

What does a business owner have to do to enable their company to find the right direction in order to progress to the next level, and to ensure that it doesn't run out of steam?

And how can that be achieved without diminishing the characteristics, the passion which enabled the company to be appreciated by its customers in the first place?

What prompts, and importantly, what will enable, an owner-managed business (across all generations) to look beyond the day-to-day and define or rekindle its ambitions?

In a series of papers leading up to publication of The Right Direction digital book commissioned by Xeinadin Xebra Accounting, business founders and owners share their thoughts.

This is one of the interviews to be included.

Back to being an entrepreneur

As it happens, Andie Chessun would have been quite happy where he was, minding someone else's business.

“To be honest, I had started a couple of other companies which didn't work out as I had expected them to, but then I was lucky enough to work for a German concern which wanted someone to run their UK subsidiary and said I could run it as if it was my own business,” he explains.

Which was working out fine until there was a change at head office. “I like having everything organised, but now everything had to be firmly in the right box at all times, and it got to the point where I felt held back,” he recalls.

“My ideas weren't being listened to, and I didn't feel I could take the business any further.

“Then when the business was sold to a competitor, I was persuaded to sign a TUPE agreement, but I discovered the instant they took over that they were a numbers company with little interest in people. The upshot was that I took their offer of three months' money and I was away.



Andie Chessun

“I had phone call after phone call from other companies suggesting I should talk to them, which was a pleasant surprise, although a friend in the industry took me to one side and said ‘why not set up on your own; you’re obviously well known in the industry’.”

What helped to influence his decision to do so was an approach by someone he had known for years who was looking for a UK distributor.

“I decided setting up my own business would be a ten-year project – and then retirement,” says Chessun “Straight away, I got my passion back.”

And some! His company, Humidity Matters, are now one of the country’s largest independent suppliers of humidification equipment.

“I’m doing exactly the things when I was first appointed by the German company, but the difference is, rather than having boundaries imposed by a parent company, I’m free to decide what they should be,” he explains.

“I can set the prices and take the initiative to bring products together from different manufacturers to offer systems to the customer, which I couldn’t do before. Let me give you an example. We were really niche, only working in the (HVAC) heat, ventilation air conditioning sector, but I realised by bringing together two off-the-shelf products we could create a steam generator for spas. It’s my baby!

“People who worked with me when I was managing companies on behalf of their owners would say I was pretty laid-back, allowing them time to do what they had to do. But the reality was that when I got home I was pent-up because I didn’t feel I could vent my frustrations to people at work.

“With the German parent company, in reality, it was like being tied but on a long leash. When it was taken over, with the new owners it was the equivalent of being handcuffed to hooks on the wall.

“Now with my own business, and this must sound counter-intuitive, I’m more mellow at home, even though I’ve got more responsibilities now. I don’t dwell on what could go wrong, because negativity is more likely to result in a negative outcome, and in any case you’ve got to have been optimistic to want to



start your own business in the first place, so why not continue that way of thinking.

“If you’re over-anxious as an owner-manager you tend to be on people’s backs when your role should be supportive of staff, allowing them to manage their work so they can make a difference. Then you have a culture where they have the confidence to come back to you and say, this isn’t working, can we talk about what to do about it, without feeling that it’s going to result in some kind of censure.”

“As a hired manager, my reward was my bonus because I had hit my numbers,” Chessun recalls. “Now it’s watching everything grow around me. Yes, as the owner of the business, I am more in control, but that allows me to enable things to happen rather than micro-manage.

“I don’t want to work until I drop, but I don’t want to exit and wonder what to do next. The problem is when you are building a business that can become your entire life.”

www.humiditymatters.co.uk