Small hacks for small businesses

‘Marginal gains’ is a term from sports psychology that refers to making small changes and improvements that build to significantly boost performance, an approach that can also be useful in business.

Smart Energy GB has teamed up with sports stars and small business owners Dion Dublin, George North and Sheli McCoy to share their tips on how the skills they learned in sport have helped them in their roles as small business owners.

90% of small business owners are interested in the ‘marginal gains’ thinking

69% want to make changes to the way they run their business – but aren’t sure where to start

58% are more concerned about energy costs this winter compared to last year

86% agree they cannot afford to waste energy

Source: OnePoll survey, 640 GB small business owners, conducted 23-31 October 2023

SMART HACK!

Getting a smart meter is one small thing small businesses can do, as it can help give small business owners more visibility and control over their energy use and spend.
Be transparent in every aspect of your business
Transparency is so important – it’s how I approached football and the same goes for my businesses. Ensure everyone in your team understands the goal and knows how to achieve it. This is also true with my clients; I want them to know from the outset what they can expect from me and from the service I’m giving them.

Understand the value of your time!
I was a forward in football, so I focused on my mission, which was to score goals. I try to remember this when I’m being pulled in a million directions as a business owner – focus on what needs you most and don’t spend time doing things that others could do (and probably do better!).

Recognise the value of analysis
There’s always room for improvement. Analysing performance means you can effectively identify problems and changes. One way I have done this in the office is to get a smart meter installed as the data it provides helps us to monitor our energy usage and identify where cost savings can be made.

Know your competition
It’s important to run your own race in business, but there’s something to be said for understanding your competitors. In football, we studied our opponents so we could anticipate their game plan. It’s the same in business – that way you can play your own game, but know what others are offering at the same time.

To find out if your business is eligible for a smart meter, contact your energy supplier or broker for more information. You can find your supplier on our website at smartenergyGB.org/about-smart-meters/get-a-smart-meter
George North
Rugby player for the Ospreys and Wales, and co-owner of Baffle Haus café, Monmouthshire

Making use of technology
In sport, tech is essential for tracking your progress and data analysis enables you to become a better sportsperson. Behind the scenes at the café, implementing technology is a hack that’s paid off big-time. It’s this reliance on tech that’s turned me on to getting a smart meter. In rugby, I’m a player who likes to be in control of the game, and I’m no different in business – it will help me control my energy usage and keep an eye on costs.

Don’t be afraid to make mistakes
There is no blueprint for success. Don’t be afraid to try things outside of your comfort zone. This is something I’ve definitely kept in mind throughout my rugby career. I’ve been lucky enough to win the Six Nations on three occasions, and each time we had a different strategy. If you stay at the same level, you’re moving behind as everyone else is catching up. In business, it’s the same – you have to keep things fresh and exciting for your customers too – whether that’s a new menu item, or an elevation of customer service.

Having a hobby outside of your job
This allows you to decompress and switch off when you’re done at work. I’ve always had a passion for coffee, motorbikes, and business. And, I’m fortunate enough to be able to combine all three alongside some of my best mates. Spending time with my family or with my passions is how I best switch off.

Have patience
Success doesn’t happen overnight. It’s about perseverance and effort. We have huge ambitions for Baffle Haus and Baffle Culture, but just as great rugby teams aren’t built overnight, it’s the same in business too.

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Quarterly goal setting

Goal setting is ingrained in your mindset very early on in sports. The same should go for your business. Setting small, manageable goals helps you stay focused on making progress which will lead to more noticeable improvements. Slowly increasing the opening hours at Sweatbox let the team acclimatise to the changes and ease them into the new rota. We were then able to add more classes to the timetable, and by the end of the quarter membership had increased by 5%.

Daily targets become habits

Setting daily targets can help you stay on track, with these then becoming second nature. I set small targets in my daily training, and I do the same in business – such as running up the petty cash, restocking the fridge, and cleaning one machine. This then trickles down to the team, as they follow my example and set their own daily targets.

Start working smart

Working smart is something I have always strived to do. From efficient timekeeping to firm deadlines, you should implement initiatives that keep you focused, driven and accountable for your actions. You need the structure, and so does the business. The latest thing we are looking to do is get a smart meter installed. The data from it will help us to monitor our energy usage and spend.

Journaling results

Writing things down allows for effective operations. Ensuring you have written documents that you can refer to in future (such as rotas that worked well, events that members really enjoyed and months you made more income, and why) means you can replicate these successes and are not reliant on memory. My motto is plan, do, review.

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