

Come outside and play in the garden!

25th November 2005

In [Are you working in a pyramid?](#), I discussed the pyramid model of many traditional businesses. Here I present an alternative, which I call the garden model, which is far more effective at getting the best from people.

The Garden Model

The garden company is an organic form, composed of the people who work *with* (rather than *for*) it. Gardens do not grow tall, but instead reach out and cover a wide area, offering many interesting and diverse paths and sights.

In the garden, there are no managers, no directors, no vice-presidents or presidents. Instead there are gardeners. The gardener's role is to encourage and facilitate growth - not by telling people what to do - but by coaching others, expanding their thinking and focussing their thoughts through compassionate, congruent listening and questioning. Everyone in a healthy garden business takes on a gardening role at some point.

The structure of the garden business is dynamic. There may be many different roles and responsibilities, but they are not fixed. People are separated from their roles and can take different roles at different times. The roles shift and change according to need, and people may have varying levels of responsibility across different roles. Roles are assigned through negotiation and peer-recommendation, not competition.

Performance & Communication

A person's performance is judged by themselves and their peers, and their pay is dictated directly by their perceived worth to others in the business; true performance pay that isn't constrained by notions of rank or position. The incentives are to help others, contribute to the whole and cooperate effectively; removing barriers to fast progress.

Garden businesses are wonderfully vibrant places that are full of variety. All gardens have features that stand out - people that excel or who have really grown well in their skills, knowledge and accomplishments. They achieve this not at the expense of others, but by helping them grow.

The key to all garden business is clear and open communication, achieved partly through the physical environment, but mostly through personal and team culture.

Inside The Garden

In the garden business there are no permanent private offices. Instead there are a series of large open-plan areas, grouped according to who works most closely with whom. These areas are circular, with a central discussion area, people arranged around the circle with their own desks, facing outward. A whiteboard area breaks up this circle. This allows a team to come together to tackle issues at a moment's notice. Overlapping teams are structured through overlapping these circles of desks.

Around the outside are a range of private and fun spaces and meeting rooms. These are used for more formal conversations and for privacy and relaxation. They can be booked at any time by any person.

Conclusions

Unlike the cold, dead precision of the pyramid model, the garden approach is alive, vibrant and constantly changing, if a little unpredictable at times.