

PLATO™

‘Much more enjoyable than learning from books’

Lifelong learning is a philosophy that is being increasingly embraced by people at all levels of business – and company owner Sarah Wearing is certainly an enthusiast.

Her Hampshire-based consultancy, The Art of Balance, works with public, private and third sector organisations across a range of industries to plan, implement and evaluate projects.

Two years ago Sarah felt the need to tackle something that would open new horizons and offer her a challenge. With an MSC already under her belt she considered another academic course. However, when she heard about the business development programme PLATO™ she was attracted to the highly practical nature of the peer group learning initiative.

Each PLATO™ group has 12-15 participants plus two senior executives from blue chip companies who are facilitators for the group. Meetings are held locally once a month for two years to discuss a wide range of management issues and undertake problem-solving in groups or working in one-to-one coaching relationships.



Sarah Wearing, Director,
The Art of Balance

Sarah explains her decision: ‘Academic courses are very useful but I felt that PLATO™ would be more relevant to me at this point in the development of my business, offering as it does real-life solutions to business problems by people who have, as it were, been there, done that.’

Once she began attending the monthly meetings she realised that her expectations were being fully met.

‘I could see this was going to be a fascinating experience as well as very educational,’ she said. ‘The diverse group of people with their different personalities and their varying perspectives on business were extremely stimulating.’



Serious business with plenty of fun

‘Apart from being so much more enjoyable than learning from text books, being in a group means you got lots of different ‘takes’ on every topic. The wide range of opinions was interesting and thought-provoking, often challenging the views I already held. Yet it was a very safe environment where everyone was extremely supportive. And although this was serious business we also managed to have plenty of fun.’

Among the aspects of PLATO™ that Sarah particularly appreciated were the guest speakers who offered expert advice on specialist topics, plus the flexibility of the programme.

‘You could be involved as much or as little as you wanted,’ she explained. ‘For example, you could email selected group members with a query or, alternatively, put an item on the agenda to be discussed at the monthly meeting.’

‘Altogether this was a highly practical programme and the whole experience has given me a different perspective to apply to my business. I’ve no doubt that the calibre of the facilitators makes a huge difference and ours, from Stannah and Sun Life, were excellent – enthusiastic, capable and really committed.’

‘It’s been a very worthwhile experience and I believe that PLATO™ is really valuable to small and medium-sized businesses where the owners often feel they have no-one to turn to for advice and support.’

PLATO™ is now being re-launched to build on the proven success of the original programme. It is open to owner-managers, chief executives and senior directors of companies with 10 or more employees and turnover in excess of £1.5m, who have been operating for at least three years, and have the aspiration and potential to grow their business.