

Q&A

Deb Oxley OBE DL

We asked Shawston's newest addition to the senior team to answer questions on her decision to join the board as Non Exec Director, and about her plans for the first six months of her tenure at Shawston HQ.



Deb Oxley OBE DL

Former CEO Employee Ownership Association, passionate about #EmployeeOwnership, #SustainableBusiness, providing employee ownership insight and enabling better business.

After leaving your role at the EOA, what specifically attracted you to join the Shawston team?

A strong ambition for growth. Shawston have always been vocal on their ambition to grow and are committed to making this happen. The shared ownership structure of the company obviously appeals to me and to be honest I like the team! There is a real sense of pragmatism coupled with a fun culture that runs through the entire group. It is also very new to me, a completely different industry that I have no knowledge of, that appeals to my desire to keep learning. This appointment is exciting for me, lots of new things to learn.

What are your first impressions of our people and our culture?

Well, there are three things for me. The first is there is a real family feel around the business. Lots of long term employees who are responsible for the sense of community you feel when visiting the branches. Secondly, many of the co-owners at Shawston are actual family members, lots of wives, sons, mothers who make up the teams across the network of branches. And thirdly there is a sense of care that defines the business. Everyone has the opportunity to move forward, lots of people here have started in one role and have quickly moved onwards and upwards. This is clearly a business that doesn't stand still, it has the flexibility and the agility to quickly adapt and change.

How do you think your presence at Shawston will impact the business within the first six months?

I'll add value to the People and Culture strategy of the business. I believe it's my role to define what this means to the business as a whole and how we can make it work for Shawston. I want to help the management team focus on the value of employee ownership, helping the co-owners understand their responsibilities within the company and the impact their actions and decisions have on the company as a

whole. Our people are our business and by boosting the employee voice and its representation we can really bring that ownership to life.

Describe the three most impactful things you have learnt during your time with the EOA.

The first is definitely that there is no right or wrong way to carry out employee ownership. Whichever method you choose, be that Direct, Indirect or a mixture of both (hybrid) it's all about finding the model that is right for your business at that time. The principles of EO stay the same, they just need to flex and evolve, just as the world does, daily.

Secondly, trust is key. Trust your employees, treat them in a responsible way. A democratic workplace where information is shared, people are valued for their influence within the business and rewards are just, and accessible to all. Create a workspace that people want to be part of and watch how your business prospers.

And lastly, I have learnt that there are very few new ideas. Most ideas are from the past but reworked to fit the new environment. Learning from others and developing your own path gives businesses the inspiration to face new challenges. The EO community is a very giving and generous community, they are always happy to help and share information on new challenges and how to face them moving forwards. Always network, always learn and always stay curious.

In light of the current political landscape, what's your view on ways that Shawston can support its co-owners during these choppy times?

Look at what has worked before. Not long ago we faced a global pandemic, so we have experience in managing our business through choppy waters. Stay ahead, anticipate what might happen and communicate this to all your people, all of the time. Whether the information is good or bad, communication is key. Keeping people abreast of the situation is a no brainer in difficult times, so I would say comms, comms, and more comms.

Be honest, share information, look at ways in which you can help your fellow co-owners and ways in which you can help yourself. Don't just rely on the management team to fix things, it's up to everyone to help out. As an EO business we are a collective conscience, which means whatever is happening in the business is happening to all of us. It's our business, so we all need to look at ways to help out. A full team approach.

“Always network, always learn and always stay curious.”