

A HEAD FOR BUSINESS

Twenty-five years ago a young Cumbrian businessman's vision led him to start up his own financial business from a garage conversion

David Allen

Dalmar House

David Allen



Since 1997 the business has expanded with offices in Carlisle and Dalston and over the border in Dumfries.

This month as the company celebrates its 25th anniversary, Maureen Hodges talks to David Allen, the man who started it all.

Q: You created your business from grass roots up – at what moment did you decide you wanted to start your own business?

A: It was on my 30 birthday. I was working for a firm where I had qualified, and I just felt there was an opportunity to look after customers in a much more sincere way. I wanted to provide exceptional technical expertise but deliver exceptional customer service levels too. It was a great ethos to start a business on.

Q: People always mention the cows outside your head office – why are they there?

A: We live and work in a rural area and a core part of our service offering is as agricultural accountants and tax advisers for the farming community, as well as supporting many other rural businesses. So, the bull, cow and calf outside of our office at Dalston is a nod to that, but

also just a bit of a novelty and something eye catching.

Q: What is the hardest business decision you've ever had to make?

A: A big decision for me was building our own office on the industrial estate at Dalston. It was a big step. When we took on the project it was waste land and to now see 12,000 square feet of purpose-built office with views of the Lake District is transformational.

Q: What is the most important risk you took?

A: Setting up my own business was a big risk, but certainly the most pivotal. It did not seem it at the time as it was great fun, but now that I look back it was an enormous decision. I was not a manager or fee earner where I worked, so I had no clients of my own. I was starting from scratch, with a mortgage to pay and family to think of.

Q: The David Allen firm has evolved and diversified a great deal. Many businesses in covid times have been forced to do the same – what would your advice be?

A: My advice would be while you seek out opportunities to diversify, always remain true to your core values and what you represent as a business.

We've worked away and built our business in a very steady, solid way. We have loyal customers, some who have been with us since the year we started. We've proactively looked for and taken opportunities to do different types of work that fits with our original accountancy and tax offering. I've always been confident in our direction, and it has worked for us. We've stayed committed in wanting to do the best job we possibly can for our customers.

Q: You offer far more than the original accountancy services you first set up – how do you manage to offer an array of premium services under one roof?

A: I've always strived to recruit technically excellent people with diverse skills and expertise. Our focus is on technical excellence, with outstanding customer experience. My advice to all my managers and anyone recruiting within the firm, is to always try and recruit better people than yourself.

Q: You talk a lot about inspiring your teams – who has been your inspiration in business?

A: My parents have been the biggest inspiration to me. They taught me to do things in the right way, never



From left: Jeremy Griffiths, Cumberland show committee member, Nina Oxley, H & H Group Plc, Ian Powley, Carrs Billington, and David Allen, David Allen Accountants, at Cumberland Show Supporters Evening at Pioneer Foodstore, Rosehill, Carlisle in January 2020

mind what others were doing. This has really worked for us and works well in a professional advisory firm. Another inspiration was my maths teacher at Nelson Thomlinson School – Mr Peter Murphy. He really cared and wanted to make a difference.

Q: What does leadership mean to you?

A: I love seeing our people blossom, and they can only do this in an organisation with the right culture and we focus on building and maintaining an amazing

environment in which they can thrive. Leadership and inspiration go hand in hand, and I love inspiring other people and seeing them develop. I want to show them how good they can be, help them see their full potential. Coaching, mentoring, inspiring and motivating – I strive to do these things every single day.

Q: How would your employees describe you?

A: They would describe me as someone who loves their work and is very committed to our business and our brand. They

would say my door is always open and that I always make time for people. They'd perhaps comment that I love seeing people develop and I often say, "fill your boots", which means get on and we will support you all the way. I often receive comments about wanting success for everyone and I like celebrating success and sharing perks with the team. One member of the team said I'm too nice!

Q: You offer a great amount of support to the local youth and have a comprehensive apprenticeship scheme – why is this?

A: Our business is based on our people. We are only as good as our people and the youth are the future. I want to give the best opportunities that I can to young people and see them develop. We're here for the long term so I want to create as many opportunities as I can. I've built a life for myself in a community, and it is lovely to see local young people getting on and building a life for themselves here too.

Q: What is the biggest misconception about an accountant?

A: From the outside accountancy looks boring, but I love my job. I'm dealing with different people and different challenges every day. I love getting to know my customers, caring for them, wanting the best for them and going out of my way to excel for them.

Q: For anyone stepping into a career into accountancy, what is the one thing they must do?

A: Like anything else - work hard. Commitment and dedication make a big difference. Don't wait for things to come to you, work for them to come your way.

Q: What is the one thing that makes you most proud of your business?

A: I love our whole brand and all it stands for – having great people that do a great job for customers. Simple.

Q: What are your goals for 2022?

A: We will continue to grow. We have some fantastic plans to develop our people, continue to recruit the leading technical experts and continue doing a great job for our customers.



David Allen headquarters