



Country Lodge

Nursing Home, Worthing

Preparing a business for retirement

Country Lodge Nursing Home in Worthing is a highly-rated care home providing nursing care for elderly people. Privately owned and managed by husband and wife team, John and Claire Wright, they offer permanent residency and respite care for 26 residents. A few years ago, the couple felt their business needed some help to put it in a better position. Claire explains what happened next.

"We knew about ActionCOACH and had enjoyed an evening seminar with Brad Sugars but, ultimately, it was the rapport with James Akin-Smith that sold business coaching to us. Our business already provided a good income - we employed 36 staff to support 23 residents - when we started working with James in January 2015. We moved ahead with our plans to build a wing to increase capacity but we also felt we could make some improvements to become more efficient and increase profitability.

"Working with James has given us a new perspective on how we run our business. Given that one day we will sell the Home, we wanted to make it run smoothly without our daily involvement and also afford John a bit more time off as he gets older!"

Initial Improvements

"During our regular coaching sessions, James focused our minds on tweaking the business in increments, small changes we could achieve easily which together would make a big difference. In our type of business, higher turnover means higher profit as our costs are relatively static. James gave us the tools to understand the numbers of our business better - occupancy rates, the cost of those void periods and how our business value would be calculated when it eventually came to the time for us to sell.

"Our residents and their families choose Country Lodge for many reasons including our care rating but they have to trust us, like

the whole team and get a good feeling about leaving a loved one in our care. John and I are not technology savvy so James introduced us to someone who could upgrade our website to ensure potential clients would start building a good opinion of us right from their first research stage. Our website had always been a good source of enquiries but by improving the photographs, testimonials and SEO plus instigating a Google adwords campaign, it became our number one source of quality enquiries.

"We worked out during one coaching session that five enquiries would lead to two or three viewings and one sale. Spending time working ON the business rather than IN the business gave us a new freedom and the results began to show very quickly. When our turnover increased from £850,000 to over £1 million, it was a very exciting milestone for us!"

Preparing for the future

"Each meeting with James brought new ideas for growth or efficiencies, things we may have eventually come up with on our own but not with the regularity our coaching provided. A business is often valued at seven times its turnover, so an empty room at £1,000 per week multiplied by seven was a major motivator for us to improve our occupancy rates. When we started working with James our average occupancy rate was 85% and now it is between 90-98%.

"We have a set of KPIs around occupancy, catering costs, new business enquiries and other business functions which we review at every meeting. This means we must gather this data from our team who also have their own KPIs which feed into these. We've become much more methodical and systematic in our approach to the business. Of course, this is a people-led business delivering care, so John and I know our staff, residents and their families really well but this means it is difficult to step back and take an

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objective look at the business - James has been instrumental in helping us do that.

"With John wishing to step down his day-to-day work, we needed someone to continue the operations role just as our nurse manager runs the nursing side of the business. With the additional income from our new wing, we were able to employ an administration manager and we are working with James to take steps to maximise the development of this new role. John still goes into the business most days but he's now free to work on strategic developments and those projects which you often put aside because you're too busy."

Advice for others

"John and I wish we'd had a business coach several years ago. Investing in sound advice and taking the time for professional development has been invaluable. We've felt in control over the last three years thanks to James' support. He is our sounding board, offers sensible advice and, on the rare occasions when John and I don't agree on something, James is a tactful arbitrator who brings us to a resolution.

"**Engaging** a business coach has improved our work-life balance and wellbeing whilst the business growth has ensured job security for our team as well as creating new opportunities for employment in our area. I'd recommend any business owner to seriously consider using a business coach like James. When someone cares as much about the success of your business as you do, they are worth their weight in gold."



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