

Transformation of "Denner Satellites" to "Denner Partners"

The Swiss discount supermarket DENNER built up a complementary retailer network in rural areas over several years. The stores, managed by independent retailers, were called "Denner Satellites". Nomen nest omen: these satellites, which had been neglected for some time, were operating increasingly independently and autonomously. At the same time, they were becoming less and less competitive.

To counteract this trend, Denner decided some years ago to completely rebuild this business unit and bring the stores up to scratch: modern, attractive, and professionally managed. After this revamp, the stores would no longer be called "Denner Satellites", but "Denner Partners". When we first met the manager of the business unit Denner Partners, he told us:

«We want to invest in the transformation in the stores over the next years, which is in the interest of the customers, the retailers and Denner itself. However, many aren't open and willing to let Denner enter their store (i.e.: practically their "living room") in order to reconfigure it. This store restructuring entails that the retailers need to confront their own history and future. This process often causes fear and insecurity, which in turn strongly influences our negotiations. »

In short: his team had to lead difficult negotiations with the retailers! Accordingly, he wanted to prepare the members of his team for this challenge. To achieve this goal, Sumbiosis worked with Denner to develop and deliver an innovative, multilevel training program.

We began with a workshop on negotiation fundamentals in February 2017. Participants learned how to use the fundamental mechanisms that lead to negotiation success. During the workshop, we quickly realized that we would need to deepen the topic "questions". (In fact, we usually find that the role and effect of arguments in negotiations is greatly overestimated; the ability to ask good questions is much more effective.) Four months later we did just that. In addition, we worked on difficult practical cases participants had experienced using the method "collegial consultation". During this session, one participant remarked:

« I'm confronted with one retailer in particular: it's impossible to motivate her to change! »

The word "motivate" reminded us of the method "motivational interviewing", which we had encountered several times previously. To deepen our understanding of this method, a Sumbiosis consultant was trained in use of this technique. We held an additional workshop for Denner in May 2018, focusing on the intersection between change management, negotiation management and motivational interviewing.

The participants made great progress – but they were still struggling with retailers who stubbornly refused all change. That is why we developed an additional workshop focusing on the question: "How can I negotiate when there is in fact nothing to negotiate?". This brought the hoped-for success.

The transformation of the old "Denner Satellites" into "Denner Partners" has proven to be successful. This is surely not just due to the negotiation training program – but the workshops contributed significantly to this success.

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