



Success Story

Profile CEO
Manager CEO Europe Id # : 33192

"THE CHALLENGE"

The Challenge

Zelia is a Belgian insurance company that was separated from its former parent company, the international insurance group Swiss Life Group.

Zelia had been for sale for two years (2003-2004) without success due to market conditions. This long period of uncertainty had left the employees, 127 at the time, worried, heavily disappointed and little motivated. My biggest challenge as an interim CEO was to boost the teams morale and, at the same time, enable the company to operate independently from Swiss Life Belgium. In addition, the non-life segment had to be separated from the rest of the company to form a separate business unit under new management.

The Approach

My main task was to separate the company from Swiss Life and motivate the staff to enable Zelia to grow again. I was also responsible for safeguarding the financial goals and establishing the company's direction in cooperation with the Board of Directors.

As a manager you always have three important focal points: Strategy, Operation, and People (Staff/Clients). Given the specific situation at Zelia, I started with the latter. During the first month, I talked to each of the employees individually and told them why I was there and what my task was. I gave them an outline of the company's future and explained that in order for me to succeed I had to be able to rely on them completely. Next, I focused on the clients. Zelia works by means of a broker network. I went out into the field with account managers every day and, for a period of three months, I visited four to five brokers daily. It was of crucial importance that they regained their belief in the organisation and supported the changes that were taking place.

Besides the motivation of the employees and clients, my other task was to analyse the current situation. In view of the separation from the parent company, the next step was to redistribute responsibilities in function of available skills and required profiles. In the end, I also installed a new, more modern and transparent accountancy system with the necessary internal control, which made it possible for us to make a fresh start.

The Result

Following the internal evaluation talks, the number of employees was reduced from 127 to 106 and a new organisation was established with a new management team. In cooperation with my team, I developed a new strategy for 2005/2006, including the definition of goals and company values. The company's new logo has been launched and the website has been restyled. To support the modernisation within Zelia, the company moved to new offices in Diegem in April 2005. I succeeded in laying the foundations for Zelia's future with motivated employees and satisfied brokers. Insurance activities came back on the right track, the turnover showed an upward trend and the employees once again felt involved and were motivated to help shape their company's future.



Dirk van den Brandt
iCEO #33192