Carl Smith  
Operations Director, Metalliform Holdings Ltd

Case Study  
The Henley Leadership Programme

Carl, how did you come to be on the Henley programme?
‘The Leadership Programme was actually chosen for me by the main shareholder of our business. He and I had increasingly recognised that the expansion of the business was putting a lot of stress on me, and he felt this programme would give me some of the support and personal development I needed.

‘I hadn’t done any formal training for many years, but I knew I had to do something; I needed help to guide me back to normal behaviour and the confidence to delegate more responsibilities away from me. I felt as if I was taking on everyone else’s problems, and had to clean up after them, but in hindsight, I probably encouraged it. Looking back, I can see that I had a very low tolerance level for failure.’

So what were your perceptions of the programme and how did it compare to your expectations?
‘I was very nervous! And I’d read up about the programme, and knew what a prestigious place Henley was, but if anything, this made me even more anxious! The pre-course work was interesting, but as the programme start date approached, I remember praying for something to happen that would prevent me from going. But I know now that that would, of course, have been a big mistake.

I just thought that I wouldn’t be up to it, but it turned out to be one of the best things I’ve ever done.’

What were the highlights and surprises for you?
‘The surroundings, the accommodation, the catering – it all creates such a nice environment, and it meant I could relax. And the people on the course were fantastic. Initially, when I realised I was the only manufacturer in the group, I felt really intimidated, but we very quickly gelled, and I saw that everyone had problems, even if they weren’t all the same as mine.

I soon realised that I needed to be honest about myself, and before long I found myself telling my whole life story to a group of strangers. So there was a lot of soul-searching.

And the quality of the lecturers was second-to-none. They were experienced people, who had walked the walk, so I could relate to them. It really was a great experience.’

What impact has it had on you, both professionally and personally?
‘I’m mentally stronger, and far more reflective, far calmer. Actually, I can’t believe how different I am as a person! I’m more positive, and far more active. I had a medical as part of the programme, and nearly died when they told me I weighed 18 stone. Since then, I’ve lost five stone, and the physical change in me is a reflection of the mental one. It’s been a transformational journey in lots of ways.

And my relationships with friends, family, colleagues – almost all of them have changed for the better. The programme gives you real insights into other people.’

So what advice would you give to anyone considering such a programme?
‘Henley is a fantastic place to learn. But be open and honest, and commit to the learning. Throw yourself in, and you’ll never be quite the same again.’
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Before

After

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