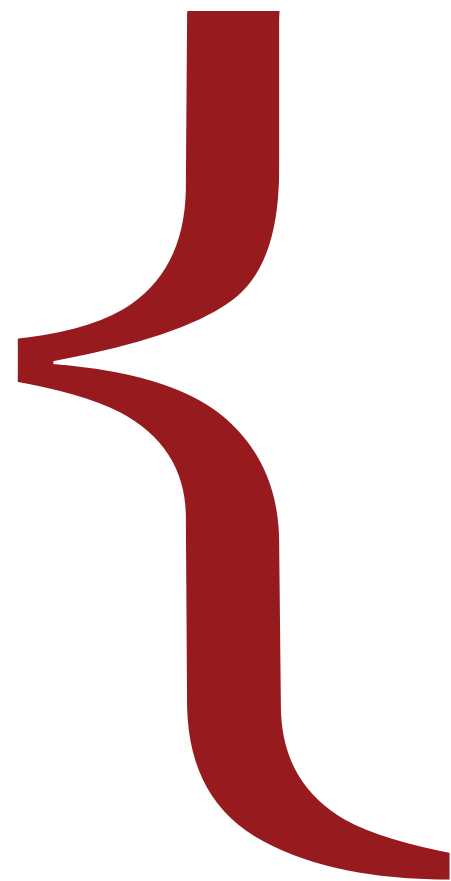


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In 1991, in a cramped terrace block on Sackville Street in the heart of Bradford, John Jakes decided that he wanted to help people who struggled with the stairs in their own home



Jakes began by servicing and recycling stairlifts made by a variety of manufacturers, but soon discovered that supply could not meet demand. Realising that the product had mass-market appeal, he quickly shifted his business focus from straightforward reconditioning to the design and manufacture of new stairlifts.

Starting with a clean sheet on design, Jakes set out to develop a product that resolved the shortcomings of his competitors' lifts – and so the 'Acorn Superglide' was created. Rapid growth saw the company move to much larger premises in Shipley, where more than 1,000 units per week are now assembled. Through Jakes' commitment to independence in enterprise, the company is able to boast that the Acorn Superglide is currently the best-selling stairlift in the world.

Creating this internationally successful company hasn't given Jakes any illusions, though; he hasn't forgotten his Yorkshire roots, or those from the area who encouraged and supported him in his venture. Indeed, he proudly acknowledges the encouragement and support that his now-global enterprise received from the local community, and, in turn, actively supports and encourages

the development of his staff team by putting in place a structure that allows all of his employees the opportunity to develop their potential and realise their goals.

Community enterprise

Whereas traditional approaches to talent management work within a company – beginning at recruitment stage and then working with staff through their career – for Acorn, a more inclusive, innovative initiative was developed that directly links the company to its local community through recruitment and workforce development.

A local HR consultancy, the Caleb Group, was commissioned to develop and manage the Acorn Talent Management (ATM) scheme, the reach of which extends back beyond recruitment and into the multi-ethnic community from which a high proportion of Acorn's recruits are drawn.

With 20 years' experience of social enterprise and generating opportunities for third-sector communities, the Caleb Group combines conventional approaches to recruitment with best-practice community development to promote improved access to employment.

UPWARDLY MOBILE





To further facilitate the process of workforce development in its local neighbourhoods, Acorn entered into a partnership with the community through the Caleb Group and the Learning and Skills Council's West Yorkshire Sub-Regional Investment Plan (SRIP). The partnership effects the development of supported work placements that include access to training and, as the need arises, key skills support.

Acorn also recently sponsored Michael Croft, Managing Director of the Caleb Group, and local HR Manager Kate Gledhill to attend the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) 'Diversity Conference', with a view to formalising the company's diversity and inclusion policies. Croft has

already worked with Joanne Kennedy, Managing Director of Acorn, to develop a Corporate Citizenship programme incorporating local supply chains as a contribution to both the local economies and to workforce development.

Talent management

As Acorn continues to develop on an international scale, its ATM programme has harnessed the company's commitment to entrepreneurship and simple structures, and so maintains the qualities and characteristics of Acorn at all levels of the global business. The programme promotes leadership potential irrespective of responsibility, and considers that appropriate leadership behaviours –

entrepreneurial growth supported by high-quality management and management information – promote most effectively the qualities of Acorn as a global organisation.

Access to each level of the ATM programme is through what is termed a 'gateway', essentially a set of assessment criteria based on behaviours and skills. Once an employee is through the gateway, their personal development becomes a key feature of their job role as they pass through to the training stage, and are assessed in terms of increased performance. 'Performing' is the next stage and appropriate measures are developed to determine the performance of individuals in terms of their job role and potential development.



Acorn entered into a partnership with the community through the Caleb Group and the Learning and Skills Council's West Yorkshire Sub-Regional Investment Plan



The ATM programme – and Acorn itself – succeeds because of its emphasis on positive support and encouragement working in practice, as the following company case studies illustrate.

Case study: Jules Allen

Jules Allen is responsible for generating appointments and sales for the UK retail sector. He manages a team of 8 team leaders and agents and 80 field sales agents nationally.

Jules joined Acorn in July 2001, when he was hired as a factory operative – which means he actually built stairlifts. He wanted to learn other aspects of the business and so was given the opportunity to move into a sales role in a telesales team. Here, Jules thrived; it was clear that he relished the buzz of sales and could spot the endless opportunities that the company presented. He quickly became a team leader.

'Acorn has helped me develop my skills through a variety of management training courses, as well as support and encouragement. I'm proud of what I have achieved. I enjoy what I am doing and really like the team I work with,' Jules enthuses. 'The company has grown so much since I joined; I've seen so many changes. Despite all that, Acorn still has that family-run firm feel. It's one of the

many things that make Acorn such a great place to work. Hard work is definitely rewarded.'

Case study: Liz Cockcroft,

General Sales Manager Liz Cockcroft ensures Acorn's US subsidiary is run efficiently and profitably, as the US side of the business continues to expand. Liz joined Acorn in 2001 as an assistant accountant, helping the management accountant in preparing accounts for all of the new Acorn companies.

Liz grew with the company and realised her ambition to develop a career by quickly became the company's management accountant. Through developing her career and showing her commitment to Acorn, Liz was offered the opportunity to take up the position of operations manager in the company's US head office in Orlando. The post meant Liz worked with the general manager to develop the American market.

'Moving to America was a fantastic challenge for me. During my time with Acorn, I've been on a variety of skills training courses and management training. I've learnt so much and had many exciting experiences, and now I'm involved in every aspect of the business as I am now the general manager. You never know what is around the corner at Acorn, and that's the best bit!' Liz exclaims.

