



Lifeboats

INTRODUCTION

The Chief Executive of the RNLI, Paul Boissier, has made a rather surprising statement to staff in 2011 that has challenged the preconceptions of many. That is – although we perform highly and in particular during a rescue and in the way staff work alongside volunteers, it is not always the case.

Paul believes that the RNLI has the capability to become one of the highest performing organisations in the country – if not the world. He's clear that continuous improvement – or our Lean programme, will play a significant part in achieving this status, as will continuing to shift to a more empowering culture in the organisation.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

The changes that are going on here in the RNLI will change the way we work together with our suppliers in the future.

WHAT REPRESENTS VALUE TO THE RNLI?

In order for the staff to really get to grips with what we do and how we deliver high performance, the Executive Team worked together last year on a Lean event. This week-long event really clarified for us *what* the RNLI does and *how* it needs to do it.

I think we all know it saves lives at sea, but do we understand how that is delivered? They have determined that the RNLI achieves this massive undertaking in two very distinct ways:

- through rescue itself, either by lifeboat crew or lifeguard.
- through 'Prevention'. This is all about how we educate and enable all water users to take responsibility for being prepared and staying safe.

There are **three** core ingredients to delivering our two services: capable people, capable equipment, and funding, and we at the RNLI are really focusing on how we can improve them and, of course, they are all interlinked.

Everyone at the RNLI is being challenged with the question – 'in what way does my role contribute to saving lives at sea?' Some tough decisions are being made as a result; in most

departments, roles and responsibilities are being questioned, with substantial changes being made. But this has to be the right move, when the money we use to fund ourselves is entirely from voluntary contributions.

SO, WHY THE NEED FOR CHANGE?

Of course, beyond our wish to be the highest performing organisation that we can be, there are other reasons to change. As an international organisation, all of the usual drivers for change have an impact on us too.

We have a clear belief that what we do now we can do better, and for less cost, so that we can do more, for the same cost as in 2010. We need to achieve a £20M a year saving by 2013.

What the RNLI does well – but aims to do better – is continually learn from what we do; what works well and what doesn't, and improve further. This denotes a significant change in how we are talking, not just within the charity, but also how we talk to our suppliers.

Right now, we ask you as a supplier to consider what you do for, and with, the RNLI. How do you support our key services? We are confident that your organisation and the RNLI can work more closely to improve the results for all of us – and ultimately those whose lives we save. And, that we can do it more efficiently and effectively by sharing our objectives and targets, improving on quality and availability, and involving our people.

HOW WILL WE BEHAVE IN THE FUTURE?

We have a new framework for all RNLI staff to represent the RNLI Values: to be selfless, trustworthy, dependable, and courageous. This is what is now expected from all of us within the RNLI. What is remarkable to us is how easy these translate to other individuals that we may have considered to be 'outside' the RNLI, but who work closely with us, like our valued suppliers. Below it explains how you can apply these to your work with us.





Photo: RNLI/Nigel Millard

Selfless

This means a supplier:

- is fully prepared to go out of their way to share knowledge and expertise with others in order, ultimately, to help save lives at sea. Prepared to share intellectual property/resources to fulfil the project, and have RNLI business continuity plans in place
- makes decisions collaboratively for the benefit of the project, including planning shared exit strategies, even though it may not be the best or easiest for them.

Trustworthy

This means a supplier:

- respects the special responsibility they have for requesting, spending and dealing appropriately with all RNLI resources – and ensures that others do the same
- is prepared to share risks and risk management
- is open and honest in everything that they say and do and demonstrates open book accounting
- has good judgement and can be relied upon to do the right thing. Shares governance, quality assurance and contract management responsibilities.

Dependable

This means a supplier:

- consistently does what they say they will do or are expected to do
- can be relied upon to play their part whenever it's required
- takes responsibility for developing and improving their all-round ability in, and approach to, the role they play in saving lives, whether directly or indirectly
- has an appropriate quality assurance system
- delivers the agreed performance improvements the RNLI is looking for from the project, whether that is reduced lead-time, greater flexibility, reduced costs or alternative, better products, technical support or consultancy.

Courageous

This means a supplier:

- expects continuous change and challenge and recognises the importance of not only adapting and responding positively to it but driving it for the good of the RNLI. Learns from experiences
- is open to multi-organisation agreements
- is prepared to challenge, and be challenged on, processes, norms and routines for the sake of effectiveness and efficiency
- is tenacious in their search for the right results and is prepared to be creative in getting the right solutions. Is focused on resolving issues for the benefit of the project
- continuously looks for opportunities to do more/better and has a demonstrable continuous improvement philosophy.

A working example

This highlights the collaborative work that the Engineering Office and the Procurement Team have been involved with on a specific lifejacket project, beyond the usual customer/supplier relationship.

We began with our customer, in this case RNLI Operations, identifying their exact needs, and ensuring their input throughout the process. We involved an external, non-biased, expert in the form of Professor Mike Tipton. While we put together our list of minimum requirements and provided some key data, **innovation**, was always at the top of our list. We stepped back from the usual prescriptive RNLI way, and allowed our suppliers, as the experts in their field, the freedom to create the best solution. We asked potential suppliers to collaborate with each other during a joint session early on in the project.

We are continuing to work with our chosen supplier to introduce the principles of Lean into their manufacturing and servicing facilities, with the aim of continuous improvement and the sharing of realised benefits.

Finally, we involved our Corporate Services Team with the aim of securing funding for our project – and specifically for the new lifejackets that we plan to purchase.

CONCLUSION

There is a real enthusiasm on our part to share with our suppliers a different way of doing things. One that can enable us both to do what we do better, for the ultimate good of all of our organisations.

So what does that require of us? On the RNLI's part, we will be honest and straight talking. In addition to challenging ourselves, we will listen to you and we will challenge you. We will not be afraid of having what may be difficult conversations, but we will be fair and we will work collaboratively.

What does this require of you? We hope that you are ready to share where your organisation is going, and discuss with us whether it fits and supports the plans of the RNLI. Also, that you can honestly and selflessly discuss opportunities with us and other organisations to make a difference to those at risk in our waters.

There is nothing frightening or unachievable here, so we would ask you to take onboard the key messages, and embrace the changes that are to come. Be prepared to talk to us about your concerns, requirements and ambitions for the future. Working together offers all of us an alternative perspective in setting up, re-evaluating and changing the supply chain. We look forward to talking with you.