



FORGE

JAMES UK &
YONDER

FORGE EDITION 1



James UK is an award winning, contemporary British furniture brand founded by James Harrison. They produce unique, beautifully made contemporary furniture mainly for the contract market. James is also co-founder of Yonder, in Walthamstow, a niche coworking space that combines coworking with a fully equipped climbing centre.

The company has adopted a sustainable approach on the environment and makes a conscious effort to responsibly source materials and support the British manufacturing industry. James UK is located within the Blackhorse Lane Creative Enterprise Zone and employs between 4 -10 people.

KEY CHALLENGES & NEEDS

At the time of applying for Forge in January 2019, James's biggest limiting factor was time management. He felt that the furniture business was run in a very reactive way, dealing with orders and inquiries as they came in, but did not have the time or capacity to plan for the future of the business or design and develop new products and ranges. Therefore, the need for business support was to address these goals:

>>> IMPROVE TIME MANAGEMENT, ORGANISATION AND PLANNING

>>> ABILITY TO CONFIDENTLY CREATE STRATEGIC PLANS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE BUSINESS

>>> IMPROVE MANAGEMENT SKILLS

>>> DEVELOP A MARKETING STRATEGY AND THINK ABOUT NEW MARKETS

USE OF FORGE

James UK exceeded the minimum of 12 hours of business support, reaching 17.5 hours in Forge Edition 1 throughout March 2019 and March 2020. Because he had no capacity to attend workshops, James was allocated a bespoke growth plan with Forge:

Initially, he started 4 hours of 1 to 1 mentoring with Nat Harrison, from April to July 2019. Then, he continued 5.5 hours of 1 to 1 with Olga Astaniotis, from August 2019 to January 2020. He also attended 4 networking events:

- Pitching and Presenting with Confidence
- Building Networks & Great Collaborations
- People People People (recruiting, employing and retaining)
- How to use funding to launch and market your business, raising finance, writing bids and tendering with public sector organisation

1:1 ADVICE SESSIONS

The Business Advisor support was focused very heavily on operations and planning, which were the areas where James UK needed the most input.

At the beginning of the first sessions with Nat Harrison, James UK was at a pinch point; one manager was retiring from Yonder and a new hire just joined to manage daily activities. James was working in Yonder over 80% of time, and finding the time to design new products and proactively work in the business was proving difficult. Decisions needed to be made on how to move forward with the business, thus, the first couple of sessions concentrated on:

- asking key questions on envisioning the future growth of the business
- identifying what was the minimum that needed to be done to maintain the status quo in James UK
- understanding actions needed to build capacity in a business and build confidence in managing a team

With the intention to maintain the status quo as a current goal and free up time for James UK to move the new products forward, a second session reviewed team building actions and strategic plans with Yonder managers. The session resulted in:

- 1.** drawing an organisational chart for Yonder and reviewed reporting lines to see if anyone could be moved around
- 2.** reviewing the structure and objectives of meetings and decide if any can be made shorter/less frequent
- 3.** setting out some clear guidelines with a cost/benefit analysis and a scorecard for new events manager
- 4.** preparing weekly/monthly goals for each of the managers
- 5.** clarifying communications to area managers (e.g. email their updates before meetings including achievements/successes).

James was also advised to log his time to understand how much of it he spent on different areas of the business. This session also helped James to investigate using a potential virtual assistant, and provided key actions to improve confidence in managing a team.

In the third session, James needed to expand and consolidate the learning on people and time management for Yonder, because he was still struggling to allocate time to James UK furniture business. The session covered a discussion between high expectations and entrepreneurship of area managers versus what they were delivering, the current skills versus 'required' skills, skill gaps and the confusion of working without clear expectations and directions.

It emerged the importance and power of communicating using vision, mission and brand values. As a result, James:

- 1.** spoke to a Managing Director of a furniture company to assess James UK's suitability for licencing
- 2.** completed a skills gap analysis for each manager and worked with them to identify how to close the gaps
- 3.** arranged the team to work more closely together (e.g. social media manager to work more with workspace manager and the marketing person to work with yoga manager)
- 4.** set clear objectives for expansion of the Events business
- 5.** reviewed Brand Values (Community, Healthy Lifestyle, Work-Play Integration) and how to communicate them
- 6.** formalised clear 6-month/12-month objectives for each manager
- 7.** think about what James' personal brand values are and how does he show them
- 8.** looked into having an away day to build the team and allow time to remind team about the vision, mission values

In the fourth session in July 2019, James understood in more depth the actions needed to create capacity in the business. In fact, the discussion focused on reviewing time management models, by using the Urgent-Important grid and Iceberg model: 60% should be on customer experience enhancement, 20 % under the radar (ice) needs to happen stuff, 20% stop doing), prioritisation and delegation of tasks.

This session inspired James to create a bespoke weekly plan for both Yonder and James UK and started testing the time management tool, whilst planning and delegating for each areas of the businesses (James UK, Yoga, Café, Events, Workspaces).

James continued business coaching with Olga Astaniotis from August 2019, as her extensive furniture experience was beneficial to shift the focus on improving James UK business as next steps.

The main pressing issues were lack of time for James UK, which led to a considerable loss of profit in the past 36 months. James had considered licensing the brand, but a couple of exploratory meetings did not yield a solution because his range was too small. He realised the importance of starting to design again since the business needed to launch 2 ranges a year in line with A/W and S/S seasons.

That session concentrated on tackling the following areas:

Finance resource:

finding a short-term solution to the under-performing finance person working for James UK, possibly using the finance person from Yonder to take on the role temporarily until a replacement is found.

HR:

Writing a broad person and job spec, representing the skills to bring into James UK and the strategic goals to hand over to a senior person.

Changing the business model/licensing the brand:

Having made a couple of attempts at discussions with manufacturers, James was in a better position to understand the benefits and pitfalls of this approach. A useful exercise was to consider the proposal from the manufacturer's perspective and so understand better what is needed to make this an attractive proposition to a potential partner and anticipating potential objections.

Business planning scenarios:

did exercises on mapping a flow of actions, decisions and likely consequences and impact on both James UK and Yonder, due to anticipate if there are cash flow, expertise or time barriers to success.

Yonder:

discussed the possibility to offer the café to an external operator and what the steps were from, firstly, discussing with the business partner and then plan out the implications, in order to attract the right people, to maintain a certain style, price point and quality of food.

Workload:

provided suggestions to achieve a productive thinking time and allocate tasks to the team.

As a result of the sessions, James progressed the tasks and improved the following areas:

James UK

- identified a suitable finance person skilled in design and manufacturing
- as next step will need to identify someone to uplift sales (business development area).

Yonder

- secured a new catering Manager, with salary plus performance bonus
- adoption of a project plan for general performance management and appraisal, with regular monitoring of objectives
- learnt steps to improve people management and the team, explored complex issues tied up in our personalities, personal strengths and weaknesses, and comfort zones

KEY BUSINESS OUTCOMES

Using the learning and advice provided on Forge, James UK reported:

- expanding his team - employed 1 full time resource
- expanding its market
- increasing capacity to meet demand
- improved skills and confidence, notably in the following in areas (0 for low levels of skill or confidence, up to 5 for high levels):
 - Team leadership, up from 1 to 5
 - Setting vision, mission and values, up from 1 to 5
 - Community engagement, up from 2 to 4

See graph below for more.

