

Andrew Thornton: Putting Heart into Business

Andrew Thornton is an entrepreneur who has run companies for over 30 years. At the age of 24 he founded a retail consultancy and worked globally – mostly in the US and Europe – with clients like Marks & Spencer, BP, PepsiCo, Spar and Unilever. Driven from a young age to make his mark on world business, he gained distinctions in both his undergraduate and graduate business degrees at University College, Dublin, before taking a role at Mars. He burned through the ranks and worked four different jobs over 18 months, ending his stint there as Sales Research Manager. Throughout the 17 years Andrew ran his agency, he bought two properties, got married, had two children and established himself as one of the biggest players in international retail strategy. But it wasn't enough. At the peak of his career, Andrew felt empty.

Today, he believes that a 'heart-centred' approach is the only way to run a business. What is a heart-centred approach? "Leading with the heart is about being authentically yourself, and enabling others to be authentically themselves," says Andrew. "That starts with the top. Leading with the head has led us to where we are now: a profits-focused, numbers culture, where people are treated like machines."

"Starting from childhood, our command and control-based culture tells us what to do and punishes us if we don't comply. Ingrained systems that give little reward or recognition for good work exist at every level of education and in all industries, all around the world."

That's all very well, you might say. But how does this relate to running a business? Making a profit is what businesses exist to do. And that must involve commands and controls. The team at Thornton's Budgens say otherwise. When Andrew put heart-centred principles into every fibre of its business, he turned falling sales figures around to year-on-year growth. Staff started to stay instead of leave. How did he do it?

How it all began

As a graduate trainee for Mars, Andrew had moved to London from his home country, Ireland, at the age of 21. At 42, he had what he describes as a spiritual crisis. Despite being disillusioned for some time with leading the consultancy, the paralysis of the US after