

Episode 1: Origin – Victoria Brocklesby

Hunter Ruthven, senior content manager, Be the Business:

It's a business set up by two cousins, both looking to emulate their entrepreneurial fathers. Under the guidance of Victoria Brocklesby and Neil Ginger, Origin Global has morphed into a real family affair, incorporating spouses and siblings.

This week's It's The Small Things hears from Victoria about how the business maintains its family origins despite reaching a point where it employs over 300 people and has a turnover set to hit £40m. She has maintained a laser-like focus and staying close to the workforce, something she describes as the greatest and most expensive asset you have and ensuring their thoughts, ideas and worries do not go unheard or unactioned.

From round table discussions to monthly newsletters and from quarterly town hall meetings to helpful communication technology, Victoria is an inspirational example of someone thinking small to execute on a big plan. Unlike some of the other businesses we have featured on the podcast, it's not a brand you are ever likely to come across in your day-to-day. We think there's an awful lot to learn from the journey Victoria and Neil have been on with Origin. This is It's The Small Things with me, Hunter Ruthven.

Victoria, welcome to the It's The Small Things podcast, thank you very much for having us into your head office and showroom where we are right now. A little bit later on we are going to go and check out the factory floor as well, that's the really nice thing about what you guys are doing, you've got everything within a fairly small distance so we'll hop on over and check out all the products that have been made but for now a chance to find out a little bit more about the business, yourself, the changes you've been making so thank you very much for having us in.

Victoria Brocklesby, co-founder and COO, Origin Global:

You're very welcome, thank you for coming.

HR

Great, so a business set up by cousins...

VB

HR

That's not something you hear everyday. You hear a lot of husband and wife, maybe siblings, but cousins? That's quite an interesting one. How did that come about and what can you tell us about working with a cousin and why it works?

VB

It was quite a natural progression really because our fathers are brothers and they worked together for over 30 years. So I suppose we are quite a close family, and as cousins we have sort of grown up almost like brothers and sisters.

When it came to starting Origin, it was really quite easy. We got on very well, we had very similar interests and Neil and I happen to get on personally and professionally. So it made a lot

of sense at the time. My father and Neil's father, like I said, have been in business a long time together and we used to work in the business, growing up in school holidays and so we'd got used to being together in that environment so it just made perfect sense.

In terms of working with cousins and extended family, as it happens my husband works here as well, so does my brother, so does Neil's brother so there's a lot of us here. More non-family than family now but in the early days it was mostly just family. But I think if you can get that combination to work and that set-up it's hugely beneficial. Firstly from a trust perspective, we are a very close knit family anyway and lucky that lots of us all live close by and we have all grown up together.

We all trust each other implicitly, which makes for a very easy working environment from that point of view. We've learned to respect each other professionally, so you can still have those slightly difficult, possibly awkward conversations without everybody taking offence. You do hear horror stories about family businesses and we're lucky that that's not been us, we've been able to have those conversations but walk away at the end and remember we are family and we still love each other and it's not going to cause any big issues outside of the workplace, so it's good!

HR

Okay, we will come onto a bit more about those family dynamics and how that's evolved as you've grown but for people who aren't aware of Origin and they probably are quite a few because it's not a massively consumer facing business, give us a little kind of potted tour through what the business is, it's scale it's reach, all that kind of thing.

VB

Sure. At Origin we design and manufacture aluminium door and window systems. The first product we started with was bi-fold doors, which at the time was a relatively new product to the marketplace. We didn't quite realise the impact it is going to have on the industry but mostly actually on the homes that these products were actually going into.

So our products, certainly with a bi-fold door, haven't really been your sort of bog standard fenestration products like putting a window in your house these were actually changing the way people were living, really changing the way people were interacted with their family, interacted with the outside and that's been a real sort of defining moment for us.

Once we'd really mastered the bifold door we thought, 'Hang on we can potentially do this to other products'. So we have taken windows, improved the design and made them much more aesthetically pleasing. These days people watch Grand Designs. They've got this aspiration to have these homes that you drive into and you think, 'Wow I leave here' and it becomes part of the environment, part of nature. They want it to interact with the outside more. Our product allows people to do that. So it becomes more of an architectural design piece rather than just a door, just a window.

HR

Put some numbers alongside where you guys are now in terms of turnover and staff.

VB

Sure. We started with just a few of us and now we are almost 300 members of staff at Origin. That's been a big change and it's complicated sometimes with the culture, trying to keep that

family feel and that small business culture when actually you have got a lot of people that need supporting and nurturing. We want everyone to come to work and enjoy what they do.

Numbers wise, the growth of the business has been phenomenal. In the very early years it was growing exponentially every year and it was good fun. Whilst growth does slow eventually, we are still growing, still on that growth curve and still have new products. Next year we are going into 2020 with a full suite of new products. It's the first time we have done that so I'm excited to see what that holds.

Our turnover is around £40 million, which is a beast of a business to be running. But we've got huge aspirations for where we want to take that in terms of numbers. We tend to look at numbers not so much in terms of revenue in terms of units that were actually getting out of the factory. We tend to concentrate on that more than the actual revenue. In fact, the revenue targets are there as I suppose it's something everyone understands. It's something that comes as a by-product of doing all the other things right. So we look at the activities, the number of customers that we're dealing with on a regular basis which we've actually increased this year by almost 50 per cent which is incredible. These are trade partners that are based all over the UK. It's on a great growth curve and we're looking forward to 2020. It's going to be an exciting year.

HR

That's fantastic. The business is 18 years old, so it's fairly mature. What kind of moments do you look back on over that period as being fairly important for you getting to where you are now?

VB

There have been several. The moment that we decided that, whilst bi-fold doors was a great product and we'd seen growth from it, we wanted to explore other products and start being a little bit more 3 dimensional with the offering that we had. That's been a big change for us. Our customers know that we are good at what we do therefore they really want us to actually come and provide them with all their products. Lots of our customers only use us as their suppliers. They want to put all their eggs in one basket which is really saying something.

Probably our biggest change that we had, in our mindset more than anything, was putting the customer in charge of when we delivered their product. We sat around the table and came up with this idea of your lead time not ours. This essentially means that when the customer places and says 'I'd like this will just leave it on the 15th of December', we say, 'No problem'. We don't have a lead time on any of our products, which just doesn't happen in the industry. You can order a bespoke product today and get it tomorrow. That's virtually impossible to do anywhere else. That has been a huge game changer, especially at busy times of year, especially in the run up to Christmas which is our busiest time when customers can't get hold of products from other suppliers. You pick up a lot of new customers at that time of year.

Also really just making sure we understand keeping that family friendly compassionate culture around the business for everybody that works here and making sure that environment stays that way is really important for our growth. Without the team here it just wouldn't work.

HR

Let's talk a little bit more about the team. You have described to me the workforce as being the greatest and most expensive asset that you have. 300 people, that's a sizable outlay every month so you have to make sure that that's working. Break that down a little bit for that description and then I know you're particularly keen on understanding your people and kind of

supporting them through their career. So bring that kind of together and describe how - when you are at 300 - you really do have to be focusing on those kinds of considerations.

VB

Right from the beginning, and maybe it is just because of how we are as people or because we are a close knit family, we have always treated people with the dignity and the respect that they deserve to be here. We want everyone to enjoy what they do and understand why we started the business in the first place and what their purpose is in regards to making the business successful so everybody feels that they are working towards a common goal so we really work hard to make that happen.

It's not easy all the time, especially as the business gets bigger and people are spread out in different locations. In the UK alone we've got three different locations of business, one being up in Warrington and that's much harder because it's not just down the road from us. Then we've got the US side of the business as well and it's trying to keep everybody involved. Now that is easier with technology, you can use video conferencing and we try to keep everybody together in that way.

Having everybody wanting to achieve a common goal is absolutely essential. To do that, you've got to keep everybody informed and you've got to give feedback on what you are doing. We try to do that in various different ways. One of them is round table sessions that I run personally with my brother, who is also on the board of directors. That gives people that are really on the frontline of the business dealing with our customers an opportunity to sit there and say to me face to face and say, 'I think this could be better, I think it'd be nice to change this' and just a really friendly forum for them to bring up any ideas or concerns that they've got.

Then we do quarterly town hall meetings where we're giving that information about where the company has gone where we are going to. Newsletters, it just keeps everybody included in how we are developing as a business and we've really found that that works positively. Then just come in and be happy and enjoy it because many hours of our life are spent at work and if you are dreading that Monday morning every week it's a pretty sad state of affairs.

HR

I just look at those three things you mentioned because essentially a town hall meeting, a round table and a newsletter is nothing completely original but I'd like to find out about how you yourself do them. So let's start with the round table, how does that work?

VB

So firstly, I would say it's not original but it's being consistent and disciplined and actually doing them. Lots of people talk about it, but you do actually have to do it and you have to be there and be present and it's something that I actually really enjoy being partial.

So the round table session is a couple of hours. We get people involved from all different areas of business so it's an opportunity for them to get to know somebody else in the company that they wouldn't normally interact with. Everybody gives a small introduction about what they do, how that's relevant to the overall objectives of the business, how long they have been working at Origin, what they enjoy about it, what the challenges are. We literally go around the table in that fashion, I'll ask questions and the rest of the body of the people around the table will ask questions. It's a really informal process. It tends to take a slightly different journey depending on the people in the meeting. I don't try to put a very rigid, strict agenda together. There is an

agenda but it's pretty flexible depending on the people that are there. Some are more outspoken than others, some are quite shy...

HR

How do you deal with stuff, when you have people who are more dominant than others, what do you do to get the quiet people speaking in a way that makes them comfortable?

VB

You have to be really aware of that. For some people it's a really scary proposition to be there especially with the COO. I see myself just as Victoria Brocklesby and I think I'm a relatively friendly person and it doesn't really occur to me that someone who has just started in business of a company the size of ours now shoved in a room with the COO and they have to sit there and say something relatively intelligent that that could be quite scary prospect. I just try making them feel really comfortable. I think that happens quite naturally because I enjoy talking to people and finding out about who they are, what they do, and really just asking questions and making them feel at ease and comfortable during that time – smiling at them. I'll sometimes bring up some anecdotal stuff about myself that might make them feel more comfortable so done plenty of stupid things over my time so it's normally the first half an hour if you get people in there a bit shy it be challenging but by the end I've not had a session where we haven't got people to open up and actually come out enjoying the session and then it's important feedback after that but what we have done with that information and how we have used it to improve things, because that ultimately what we want to do.

HR

I spoke to a business owner recently who said it's important to let the silence hang in the room and fight your urge to be the person who's forcing stuff by talking a lot beginning and actually if you leave that silence hang people will eventually, it might seem uncomfortable for 30 seconds but people will eventually start –

VB

I completely agree, it is a difficult one but it is bringing people out of their comfort zone a little bit. But that's how you grow, you can't do that in the other way. You're absolutely right, the purpose of the sessions is not for me to talk, it's for everybody around that table to give us insight into what they do. They have some great ideas and if we're not listening to how we can make the business better by listening to all of these incredible people round the table then we are stupid really, it's a waste of our time.

HR

How do you make sure that those things that are brought up in the round table turn into actions? What's the plan after that discussion finishes?

VB

I take notes through the whole session and then we'll go away from that and it's normally during one of our heads of department, we meet as a senior management team on a monthly basis and we have our board meetings as well that information is fed back through that senior management team and we have an improvement process that is run by somebody here that we do all digitally really and it goes on to a system and once a month that's fed back to the company in terms of the ideas of being raised and what we've been able to do with those. But

equally if it's something that we can't do anything with right at this moment in time it is important to let people know why but thank them for their input is really important and there might be things that we can do later on down the line.

HR

So that newsletter then. Again, lots of businesses will do newsletters in different ways. If you go back to the beginning when you first set it up, what were you trying to do with it, how has it evolved, how do you populate it and what has been the feedback been from staff, the engagement and that kind of thing?

VB

Our newsletter might not be too different to lots of companies I expect. We try to keep it quite personal and informal. You've got the usual things. To start with there'll be an introductory note from myself or Andy our MD or Neil our CEO and that's normally just to give a general overview of how the month has gone.

Within the newsletter we focus on different topics. We tend to focus in on key departments or topics that are going on at the time. Recently, there's been a big push in terms of the environmental side of things. We've been going for our environmental accreditation. That's been a huge project run by someone who has been in the business for a while. She has really developed incredibly well through the company so a huge success story. She has run with the project all by herself and done an incredible job. So that got featured in there.

Things like employees... we've got lots of lovely ladies here who have gone off to have children. I'm a huge advocate of working mums being a mum myself. And we really celebrate that within the business. So much so that they always come back to work here too, which is amazing. But we put pictures of the baby, if they're happy. We'll have pictures of them with the baby; names, weights, all the things lots of the ladies probably like to know but I'm sure lots of people across the business like to know what's going on. Our Origin babies that we have.

If people have got married, engaged, that personal information that goes around the business and that all goes in the newsletter too. It's a really great opportunity to spread the word and the other side of it is the US business, which we try to include within the newsletter because for lots of people here, they don't have much inclusion in the US side of things. So it's good for them to understand what's going on over there. While it may not necessarily affect them day to day.

It changes from month to month depending on what's going on around the company. Our wonderful marketing department put it all together and collate all the information. But we find the information comes very easily. People want to celebrate and tell everyone about their achievements. It's a very positive message that goes through.

HR

And the engagement is pretty good? People are clicking and interested and I guess picking up discussions face-to-face.

VB

Absolutely people are really engaged, we get a great click-through rate in terms of opening the newsletter and we also have it all over the business as well. We've got TV screens around various offices. We also have paper copies that go out and everybody's desk, all the communal areas and posters go up around the business so we try and target people from all over the

place. It's really important. I don't really like reading that sort of thing on a screen, I'd rather read it as a leaflet. So you just need to target people in different ways so I think we get round most of the company as a result of it. Definitely you can hear people talking about the topics from the newsletter as well when you go around the business which is fab to hear.

HR

On the topic of conversation, one thing I love that you are doing is encouraging people to talk more and email less. Tell us a bit more about that and why it's so important to you.

VB

Email has been completely misused since it came out really. It was really meant to replace the old fashioned letter writing and now it gets used as text messages, WhatsApp, face-to-face conversations you should be having - all of this goes onto email. It's frustrating because it's an opportunity to say, 'That's off my desk now I don't need to worry about it, I have sent the email that's my job done' and that's not the case, there are always things to follow up on and make sure that those tasks are happening. It's become an irritating way of communicating. It's misinterpreted. I often see chains of emails that have become quite fraught and the messages going back and forth can be not particularly pleasant I get copied in towards the end because everyone has got fed up with the whole thing and I just wonder why has no-one picked up the telephone and why haven't you walked over that person's desk and found out you know why have you got these challenges, what are the reasons.

We really encourage people to use email as little as possible and it should just be for confirming notes from meetings or conversations that have already been had and then for external communication of course it needs to be used a little more than but we've invested in a lot of technology origin so we now use Microsoft 365 package which has been phenomenal. We use Teams in that which encompasses a whole host of applications that you can use to improve the way you communicate within your business. One of them is instant messaging which is great but you can use it within a project, so you have all your different projects and teams set up within. We have found that really really useful so we're working on everything at Origin and more of a Beehive mentality so all departments getting together to work on a project rather than information going from one department to another and people saying, 'That's not my job, not my department'. That's not the case. We all need to achieve a common goal. Let's all work on it together. That's really been successful and I hope one day, the overall aim is to pretty much make email redundant at Origin which would be incredible, get people talking more.

HR

When you are trying to communicate your preferences about how people communicate, how have you done that because people will have their ways of doing stuff, have their opinions on it. What's been effective for you in terms of getting a company of this size to be communicating the way that you want them to, the way you know is best?

VB

A big part of it is training on the technology that we've got. The video conferencing side, everybody who has a laptop within the company has got the opportunity. If you're working in the Warrington site and someone else in High Wycombe, they can just go on and talk to each other over Teams using video conferencing and it's a much nicer way. But you have got to train people to use it. A lot of people don't feel comfortable using it so we spend a lot of time doing that. All the different aspects of communicating within the company, the roundtable sessions, the town hall meetings, we talk about communication at every single one because it's pretty

worldwide. If you ask people of the challenges of your business, almost every time people say communication I don't know enough about what's going on. It's a constant challenge to keep people aware of it but I think training and make them feel comfortable with the technology that improves it is really important and that's something we concentrate on

HR

Let's move along to some of the bigger changes you have been making and I'd be interested to again bring it back the people because I think in the stories we have covered on the podcast, there's a common theme of changes only really possible and successful if you involve people and if you involve people in all levels, getting their kind of buy-in for what you're trying to do. How have you done that?

VB

We have done it in lots of different areas but one that really stands out for me is within our production facility and it was a real lightbulb moment. We've got amazing people all over the company and often in production they don't get the opportunity to input into the business quite as much. Part of that is the language barrier, for lots of them English isn't their first language and they don't speak particularly so we have to make a lot of effort in terms of translating information so they really understand.

One particular guy in our production facility, he was amazing. He literally came in after a weekend and had this incredible idea about changing the way we package all of our ancillaries for our windows. He went to his manager and said, 'I've had this great idea, I think we could do it like this, we can save a huge amount of space in the packaging and it makes it easier for our customer'. Brilliant idea, looked at it, absolutely worked perfectly so we got straight on it and made the changes and it's actually saved 50 per cent of the space where all of the boxes that we used to package our ancillaries, we have actually saved 50 per cent of that space which has now been used for more manufacturing space which was fantastic from manufacturing point of view but also saved us a huge amount of money in terms of materials for the packaging so it's environmentally great as well as financially. He feels brilliant about it, we talked about it in the newsletter, we talked about it at the town hall meeting. So people realise that we really do take these ideas seriously and they've had a really positive impact on how we run as a business.

That's just one example, there are other things happening all the time within departments I probably don't even know about but I do know it's a continual improvement at Origin is part of our culture and and we don't worry if you get something wrong, failure is an opportunity to make an improvement that is part of what we are and what we stand for.

HR

That sounds like a fantastic example of a small change, shall we go check it out in a bit more detail?

VB

Definitely, let's do that. It'll be much easier for you to see in reality.

HR

Victoria, we are on the factory floor now, this is where all - well not all the products - are made but some of the products are made?

VB

Yes, this is our windows factory. We've also got the doors and various other products as well.

HR

It's a hive of activity around here. If you don't know what's going on it all looks very confusing but I am sure there are lots of processes and systems keeping it all on the rails, making sure everyone knows what they're doing, efficiency, all that kind of stuff. Small changes can have quite an impact in an environment like this.

VB

Absolutely. It's imperative that we are looking at them all the time. The number of units coming off the production line at any time is essential to us meeting our targets, meeting the requirements for our customers. We're keeping track of that all the time and any small improvements we can make, we are going to do.

HR

You mention the components wall, that's had quite a big impact. Shall we go and see what that looks like.

VB

Absolutely.

HR

So when did this particular change come about?

VB

It's been coming up for about a year now. We have been able to see the effects that it has had, which have been amazing.

HR

This is one that has bubbled up from beneath, it has come from someone working here everyday.

VB

Working in the factory everyday, manufacturing the windows.

HR

They are the ones seeing the friction points, the inefficiencies.

VB

Absolutely. That's why it's so important to give those people a voice. They are the ones that know how we can make improvements, how we can make it better so it was fantastic and it is great that Damien who hopefully we will get to meet felt like he could speak up and come up

with this improvement that he saw, something that was so obvious to him and nobody else had noticed it.

HR

We are at the site of the change, tell us what we are seeing.

HR

Here are our window ancillary boxes. One of these boxes goes with every single window that we manufacture. What used to happen prior to this new system was that we would have one box per new window frame and some of our customers may be ordering 40 window frames and 40 boxes were going out. It was hugely inefficient, a real pain for our customers having to deal with 40 ancillary boxes. Environmentally it's not great, far too much material we're using and not to mention the space it was actually taking up in the production facility. It was a huge amount. So, Damien came up with this amazing idea to try and improve on that to make it better for our customers, reduce the space, financially better and impact positively on the environment too.

VB

Let's bring Damien in. Damien, this was your change that you brought about, what were you thinking about when you suggested this to your manager?

Damien: The main point was designed to attach this box into the frame, and it cannot be loose on the transit. That's the main point of the idea. The second one is environmental, we removed all the plastic packaging. It helps organise our work.

HR

On a day-to-day basis, you being on the factory floor, what kind of impact does something like this - is it all about efficiency? When you look at what was before and what is now, tell us how it allows you to work better?

D

We can deliver on time in full to the customer with less complaints and it helps us produce less waste, with no plastic, just cardboard.

HR

Victoria, when someone on the shop floor has an idea, they take it to their manager, how do you then set the ball rolling to have that bring about a change?

VB

Damien spoke to his manager about it, who thought it was a great idea. Everyday they are having team meetings, every morning they are talking about what happened yesterday, what's going to happen today and what improvements could be made. They get brought up in those sorts of environments. But we hopefully have a culture that allows people to bring it up organically, so it doesn't need to be brought up in a formal environment or meeting, people can come forward and just say, 'I have this idea, what can I do about it?'. |

Commented [1]: Opportunities every day for staff to raise ideas and suggestions.

My brother works in the production area in terms of the senior management team, and we have the incredible production director as well and they're just really open to these types of ideas and

bringing it right to the top so we can make decisions and make those changes really quickly and effectively.

HR

And new products being added, expansion going on, are you hoping that this is the kick-start of other people having other ideas?

VB

Definitely, no idea is a stupid idea, let's encourage that whole ethos of if we want to improve we have got to embrace all these different possibilities. Some will work, some won't and we will give them a try but don't be shy in coming forward. That's the message going out to everybody.

Commented [2]: No idea is a bad idea

HR

And you can now start sharing changes like this, suggestions like Damien's, in the newsletter and stuff like that.

VB

Absolutely, Damien featured in an article in our newsletter, which hopefully encourages other people to have Damien's courage to come forward and say, 'I've got this great idea and I think it can improve things'. I hope that it encourages that across the whole workforce and certainly we have seen in other areas as well so it's been really positive for us.

HR

Thank you for sharing this, Damien thank you for showing us - really helpful - thank you. So we have seen that from Damien, really impactful change, hopefully this is the kickstart of other people coming up with these ideas and saying, 'I'm not afraid to challenge the normal way of doing stuff'.

VB

We want to encourage that across the business, we have been trying to do that by including what Damien has done in the communication around the business. We did an article on Damien within our newsletter. It shows everybody that Damien's courage to come forward and say 'Hey, I've got an idea' - other people can do that and don't feel afraid to come forward. We are hoping to see lots more of that within the business. It's been phenomenal to see what's happened as a result of Damien coming forward.

HR

And in a business like this which is growing, there's new products, there's constantly stresses and strains being put on the business, there's so many more opportunities people to just to say there's one little thing that I see day in and day out, you don't see and that's alright, I'm going to put forward suggestion and let's improve stuff together.

VB

It's one of the downsides of growing. When I was involved in the business when it was much smaller you would see all these things going on and you could pinpoint where improvements could be made. But now I'm not involved in the day-to-day as often, having amazing people that

work for you that are interested in making it better is hugely important. That comes from having a culture of making that the way things are, making people feel safe and that they can come forward with ideas and they are not going to be told they are stupid or silly for doing so.

HR

And then really shining a light on the impact that thing that they have come up with has made.

VB

Definitely, it's really important to give feedback and make everybody realise how much we value that information without it we wouldn't be able to improve and grow the business

HR

And then if you can link it to, they are able to do a better job so there are opportunities for career progression, and you can start tying it all together.

VB

Definitely, it is so important that people feel like they have got the opportunity to progress if they want to within a business. We do that through a number of ways, highlighting the ideas people have had but also we make sure we are meeting with them, supporting, nurturing them through that progression. Someone might want to stay on the production line manufacturing windows and they are really happy doing that. For most of us, it's human nature that you want to get a bit better at what you do. Whether that's making your way through the ranks and progressing through the business or just improving the actual job you're doing that day.

HR

Fantastic to see this in real life. Damien has run off, he is back at his job - we have lost him already. Thank you, Victoria.

HR

Well fantastic to see what that looks like in real life thank you for showing us. Again come back to the size of business you become because I think you're at an interesting point in the company's evolution.

A lot of people don't like the word SME and small and medium and that's all lumped together but it's probably fair to say that in going past the 250/300 staff mark, you are into that M now. It might be helpful to call yourself a small business because that's how you look and behave and stuff like that but you're moving into that M. So you're at that point now where you probably don't know everybody by name, you don't know their backstories like you once would've liked to. How do you deal with that? What's you're - I don't want to call it coping mechanisms but how do you cope?

VB

It's one of the things that I - hate is a strong word - but it's one of the things that gets to me quite a lot, I take my responsibility as an employer hugely seriously. It's a massive responsibility to have that many people relying on you to make sure the business is successful - it's a lot of

people's livelihoods and we really enjoyed getting to know everyone that works at Origin and it's important that we all stand for the same things, the right people to be here.

We are slightly unusual as a business so it's probably not for everybody so it is important that you get to know your workforce. I don't know everybody at Origin anymore and I would love to say that I do but it's almost impossible. Probably from an office perspective, absolutely much more so because I'm in the office environment a lot more than I am in terms of the production. But in the production facility, it's much harder. I suppose turnover of the workforce in production is a little higher so you don't necessarily get to know people. But there are guys that have been working for us for over 10-years in the factory and I know them really well. In the days when there was only a dozen of us in the factory and office, you got to know those guys really well. Some of them are still here and that's lovely and because we interact at summer parties and Christmas parties and Town Hall meetings, I always make sure I'll go and chat to people and get to know them. I think I would recognise everybody by sight but not necessarily by name. Once we have all had a few drinks and a party everyone's having a good time anyway so it's great fun. Luckily we've got some amazing people in our production facility, our production director and my brother as well, Oliver, he is on our board of directors but really oversees the operational side in terms of production. He knows everybody there so between us as a family from a leadership point of view I think we cover all bases because that's important it's really important that you engage with everybody in the workforce.

HR

You have got lots of things - whether it's the Round Tables or the Town Halls - you have the reasons why people are brought together so I guess at that point it's making a conscious effort to maybe pick out the people that you haven't met before or don't know as well. In a room, we all always gravitate to people we know and the conversation is easy but you yourself have to put yourself out there, don't you?

VB

Definitely. I will always make sure that when we do those Round Table sessions that I get some background on people and find out about them. It's important to make that effort. I want to know that they're here for the right reasons, enjoy working at Origin, and if they don't why and find out more about them and see what you can do to make that better.

Now, with technology, there are some brilliant applications that are around. We use Yammer, one of our social media applications we use within Origin. Again a really nice way of informally getting to know people. They put personal stuff on there, it might be fundraising, it might be a charity work they're doing, something to do with work but it's a real mixture of personal and work life. I'm on there and I get to know people a little bit more.

We are also just setting up our intranet at the moment, which will go live in January. On there every single person working at Origin will have a profile and a picture, a little bit about them from a personal perspective. We also put that on the newsletter too each month, so anyone new that joins has a picture and a profile that goes with them so hopefully that way you get to know a little bit about each other because it's not just about me knowing everyone that works here but it's about everybody else interacting with different departments on different projects that they'll get to know each other. Once you've built that relationship and you can identify with someone personally, you can work with them and overcome challenges far more easily

HR

So when that doesn't go live people can go on search for someone by name, see how long they have worked at Origin for, the likes and dislikes - that kind of thing?

VB

Exactly yeah, what they enjoy doing in their spare time, what they do at Origin, likes, dislikes, challenges.

HR

Had you seen that been done somewhere else, what was the inspiration behind it?

VB

Google does it. Not that you have to copy everything from Google. Lots of companies do that type of thing now, maybe not our size. We try to stay ahead of a curve. Especially in this industry as well. It's a relatively old fashioned industry really, the door and window industry, and the construction trade in general. So we try to push the boundaries from that perspective and interacting with social media within your business is really really important - having your internal Facebook I suppose so people get that opportunity to build relationships even if they're not seeing each other in person.

HR

What type of investment is that, in terms of money and hours?

VB

It's huge. You have to look at the long-term benefits and gains that you get from that. None of them are short term, none of them are tangible. It's one of those things that feels like the right thing to do.

Everybody loves technology. Lots of people are on Facebook and Instagram and that's how especially the younger generations are communicating these days. Like it or not, that's a part of life. If you don't progress your business in that way too, you're gonna lose the engagement of those generations I think.

That's really important to keep abreast of is, now with people working much longer in terms of retirement age, you've got so many different generations working within your business and you've got to have those communication structures that suit everybody of every generation otherwise you'll lose them. We are getting there, we have got plenty of improvements to make.

HR

With the intranet, was there much internal polling to see whether that's what people wanted?

VB

Yeah, there was. Absolutely. It's not something we'd ever force - it's not for everybody, we would never force anyone to get involved in if they didn't want to but yes we talk about it in the different forums such as Round Table about what we're planning, some of the ideas that we're planning, getting some feedback from that point of view. Marketing department put polls out, which is so easy to do these days with technology that you can get information back very quickly. It was always something that people really wanted, they want to know who's working at

Origin. It's hard if you're here at head office, you probably won't go down to the factory very often.

Commented [3]: Polls about whether staff wanted something.

Actually that is something we encourage for the heads of department to organise little groups to go and visit the different sites as well. Same with the US, so we fly two of the US members of staff over to the UK every year so they can come and integrate within the UK facility too and find out how we do things so yeah it is good fun.

HR

Let's round things off by - as we like to on *It's The Small Things* - turning the magnifying glass a bit back on you. We have talked a lot about the team and everything like that but how are you as a business leader/owner, what are you doing to challenge the assumptions about how you believe the best way is to do things, the right way and all those. What opportunities do you give yourself, what scenarios do you put yourself into where those assumptions are challenged?

VB

Firstly I assume I am wrong all the time. I don't think anyone is always right, you are only improving on what you did the last time. Technology is changing faster than ever before and you've got to be able to adapt with that. There are always opportunities to improve.

I mentioned earlier about failure not being a bad thing at Origin and I have to test myself for that a lot because I'm a little bit of a perfectionist and I like to get things 'right' first time but I have to remember that's not actually possible. You give it your best shot and you learn from the results and you improve and you move on. It's challenging that in yourself and within the culture of the business all the time and making people feel safe to get things wrong is really important. If they don't they will hide mistakes and we'll never improve as a business.

All of us from a senior management point of view are all quite challenging of each other. We never just sit there and nod our heads and go along with whatever that person thinks is the right thing to do, we're constantly asking questions. Why are you doing it, what is that for, what opportunity is that going to bring, what are the consequences or the challenges? I think we're quite good at doing that.

There's lots of amazing information out there I listen to lots of podcast on various different subjects and read lots of books around business and every single one of those brings another aspect that you maybe haven't thought about before and I'm not a big fan of changing everything just based on one book or one podcast that you listen to because I think you have to just take all the information that's available around you and do the best you can with it and don't panic - you can change things, you can improve and it's all just a lot of it's just trial and error.

If you do get good results, look at the data and keep on doing the stuff that is giving you those results. So yeah, a big part of it is getting rid of the ego, not worrying about getting it wrong. Leave the ego at the door, come in, enjoy what you do, engage with people and ask questions and it seems to be working.

HR

Did you manage to get out and learn from other people like you, other business owners face-to-face? You mentioned you did something because - not because - but you knew Google was doing something. But you are probably guilty of knowing more about how Google runs than the business down the street, do you get out and try and meet people?

VB

It's something that I don't do enough of. I'm really lucky being a woman in a fairly male-dominated industry causes quite a lot of interest so I do get to speak to other people within the industry in terms of our customers and suppliers and have great relationships with them and they are always quite interested as to how on earth I ended up doing what I'm doing. Consequently you have some great conversations around and I can ask them questions about what they do as a business, how they run it, how they've built it up over the years. So within our own network of customers and suppliers, yes.

Then outside of the industry I've got some incredibly inspirational friends and acquaintances that I have met along the way at various different events and then growing up through University and the jobs they are doing now. We often have conversations around you know - and it'll be completely different industries from the financial sector through to the fashion world to teaching but I don't think it matters. I think a lot of the principles are the same and it's great to...

HR

You have some people you feel comfortable offering a random question to that sort of thing

VB

We are really lucky to have my father, who has been our chairman for a long time and an amazing man. My uncle, who sits on the board of directors as well, they've grown their business from scratch and whilst they are retired now it would be silly not to use them for this font of knowledge that they are.

Things haven't changed that much. Technology has but the principles are still the same and they've been absolutely incredible in terms of mentoring the children but they have been phenomenal to have as part of a business and we still absolutely look to them for advice as well. So yeah, grabbing it from anywhere you can.

HR

The children have done good.

VB

We hope so. Keeping their retirement pot in line, that's the plan.

HR

Fantastic, thank you for showing us all what you have. I feel like I know a lot more about a really interesting business which again it flies a little bit beneath the radar because it's not so consumer-facing, you are not going to see lots of adverts all over the TV for it but....

VB

We have recently, it finished in November but we were all over ITV and Channel 4 so we are as seen on TV now. So hopefully a few more people have seen us.

HR

Talk more, email less. That might be a good way of summing up Victoria Brocklesby in her general outlook. Email, she believes, is misused and relied upon far too much. This breeds frustration as it just becomes an opportunity to avert responsibility.

To combat this, we heard how Victoria really encourages staff to use email as little as possible. The business has invested in Microsoft Teams with instant messaging being used to bring projects closer together and create a beehive mentality centred on collaboration and uniting behind a common goal. She wants to make email redundant at her business.

Away from the digital world, Origin's Town Hall meetings and round tables are two simple but effective ways to keep insights bubbling to the surface. They have no fixed agenda and naturally evolve. But time and time again have proven to be great ways of servicing the good and the bad.

We heard directly from the factory floor about a small change that's been instrumental in streamlining production operations by achieving a 50 per cent storage space saving and, even better, that member of staff, Damian, feels great and is a living, breathing example of the leadership team really listening to those work in a coal face everyday. It's the kind of small but impactful change that can be shared in Origin's newsletter.

Finally, in a business of 300 people, Victoria knows she can't be in every part of the business, especially the manufacturing setup. That's why she goes out of her way, often out of her comfort zone, to interact with members of staff she doesn't know as well. She's challenging herself everyday to not only become a better leader but to make sure the business stays true to its family business roots.

It's The Small Things is all about making change in your business manageable, giving you the inspiration and confidence to spend more time working on the business rather than simply in it. Visit bethebusiness.com to access more helpful advice and guidance; from our benchmarking assessment tool which points you to the areas of your business we think is in most need of attention, to our expanding range of ebooks looking at different themes such as employee motivation and nifty nimble and inexpensive marketing strategies, there's lots to help. If you enjoyed the podcast then please help us by subscribing, rating or leaving a review.