

Back To Basics You and Your BDM

Befriend your

Can't get what you need out of your area manager? Former BDM Mark S Elliott offers his advice to tenants and lessees on developing the relationship

Top 10 Tips



How to improve the relationship with your BDM

- 1 Make their visit to your pub a pleasant one. It's human nature to want to spend more time with people you like
- 2 Set aside a specific meeting time when you won't be interrupted
- 3 Understand their role, empathise with their issues. Be interested in them as people – not just a representative of Big Organisation plc
- 4 Start any meeting by giving them good news – and a cup of coffee
- 5 Support your issues with facts. I know this can be hard, but try to keep the emotion out of the meeting
- 6 If things get difficult be assertive – not aggressive
- 7 Keep them informed. Get them involved early if you are having problems
- 8 Agree any important points in writing – use email where possible
- 9 When they do something for you, thank them
- 10 End any meeting on a friendly, professional note – even if you disagree about something

WHEN YOUR business development manager (BDM) visits your pub, does your heart sing? Are you overjoyed to see them and eager to sit down together and talk business? Do you see them as a great asset to your business? A trusted colleague? A friend?

No? Somehow I didn't think so.

Perhaps you quietly swear to yourself and feel like a black cloud has just descended on your pub. You'd rather endure root-canal treatment at your dentist than talk to your BDM. You just don't get along.

Or maybe you do like your BDM, but they are 'sprinters'. They attempt to beat the 100 metres record each time they visit you. You sign three pieces of paper for them, and then in a flash they're gone. You are left wondering whether you had imagined it all. Now what did you want to talk to them about?

A crucial relationship

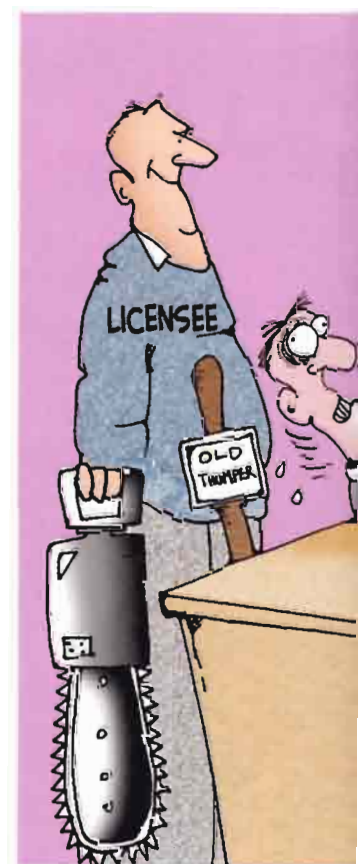
A tenant's relationship with their BDM is a crucial one. Arguably, in today's troubled times it is more important than ever before. Building and maintaining a friendly, business-like relationship is essential – much more can be achieved by working together [effectively].

So why aren't relationships better between licensees and BDMs?

Well, I'll let you in on a little secret. Some nights I wake up screaming, covered in sweat. The nightmare is horrific and always the same – I am a BDM again. In my dream, I am the man in the middle, the centre of the tug-of-war between the pub company and the licensee. One hangs onto my left arm, the other my right, both pulling me in opposite directions. My arms stretch like rubber.

I try to remain professional throughout my ordeal. I even attempt to check emails using my big toe. Then, my arms snap and I wake up. Thank God it was just a dream.

The BDM's role has changed dramatically over recent years. More of their time is now spent firefighting in a stressful, high-pressure environ-



ment. Their budgets are often limited and their time is at a premium. A large proportion of their day is spent handling problems, and they are pulled in many directions at once, beyond their control.

Friction can occur

So with mounting pressure on licensees too, it is no surprise the relationship between licensees and their BDMs can be less than ideal. When two parties are working under such pressure, friction is bound to occur.

Alternatively, you spend so little time with your BDM that you hardly have a relationship at all. This is sad and ironic, especially when you realise that licensees and BDMs have the same goals – successful pubs. If you are successful, they are too. You should be working together. And as times get harder, you *have* to work together.

A key question is: how can your BDM contribute to your success? You may think your BDM has nothing to offer you – their budgets and



BDM

WHICH BIT WOULD YOU LIKE?



authority are so limited. If this is true, then how else can they help you? Their knowledge, advice and contacts could prove invaluable. Getting them to spend quality time with you is crucial, and this works best if you have a good relationship.

In the box on the left are some tips on how you might develop and maintain a good working relationship with your BDM.

Now, I know that when things are not going well this advice may feel very difficult to follow. But please give it a go – even if you have to do it through gritted teeth. If you are sceptical, try it for a few months then reassess the relationship you have with your BDM.

But what if your relationship is so bad it has completely broken down? There are still things you can try.

Why not call them and invite them to a meeting where you can discuss how you can improve the way you work together? Make it informal and non-threatening and aim to work together to find solutions to the issues.

Hopefully, this will be enough to wipe the slate clean and get back on track. I know making this sort of gesture is extremely hard, but the benefits of a good rapport with your BDM can outweigh any uncomfortable feelings you may have about doing it.

If you continue to have difficulties with your BDM, tell them your concerns again and explain to them that you may be forced to talk to their boss if things don't improve.

Give them a reasonable opportunity to sort out any problems. Going over their heads should be seen as a last resort. Good luck – and I hope the relationship with your BDM doesn't give YOU nightmares! ■

Mark S Elliott spent 26 years working in various management roles within the tenanted and leased divisions of the UK's largest brewers and pub companies. He is author of How to Run a Successful Pub – a comprehensive guide to acquiring and running your own pub.

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