



Chairman's Report 2009/10

Early last year, before becoming your Chairman, I was contemplating with some trepidation the commitment and responsibility I was soon to take on. The Richmond Group was approaching its 30th year, a remarkable achievement not least because RG has never been large in numbers of members. "What should I try to do?" I asked myself. 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it' is always a good place to start. I had also recently met a wise old man who said: "We overestimate what we can achieve in a year but underestimate what we can achieve in a lifetime". That, it seemed to me, was a good justification for not doing very much at all.

But something began to trouble me. We have not had many new members in recent years and we are all getting older. I tried to remember when I joined RG but I couldn't – it was at least 15 years ago and possibly more. The reality gradually dawned on me that if we don't do something about our membership, as an organisation we will gradually fade away – is that what we really want?

When RG was founded in 1982 the world for consultants was quite different to what it is now. In those days there was no Internet. It wasn't as easy for consultants wishing to become independent to network, to gain knowledge and find peer support outside of the big firms. I know, because I started my practice in 1983. The world has changed for ever since the advent of the Internet.

Organisations are formed to meet a need and when that need has gone there is no further justification for the organisation – no matter how long it has been in existence. "Is this where RG is heading?" I thought.

So I then began to think about what my business life would be without the Richmond Group. It felt as if a light had gone out and I was in a dark and lonely place. Previously, I had asked one of our members who rarely attends our meetings why he continues to be a member of RG. He replied "I like to know it's there". Now I understood. The saying really is true that we never fully value what we have until we lose it.

Of course, I can speak only for myself but I don't think I am alone in the way I feel about RG. So what to do? The obvious place to start was to identify the success factors that have sustained RG over all these years. Council got together one Saturday last October and worked to produce a strategy that would identify and build upon these success factors, to nurture and sustain RG in the future. From this initial cauldron of ideas a coordinated plan was developed with tasks, responsibilities and timescales. A brief presentation of our work to date was given at the March meeting and further sessions will be held to involve you more fully in the work being done. This strategy will take many more months to implement and some of the processes it creates will be ongoing.



Our meetings during the last 12 months have been well attended, due in large part to varied programmes with quality speakers. However, a visitor to our March meeting described RG to me as a “well kept secret”. She was right – we can’t just sit back and wait for people to find us. Further, I am convinced that the **business development** objective of RG is more likely to be achieved through internal networking among a growing membership rather than trying directly to attract prospective clients through our website.

The primary purpose of the website, in my view, is to be a source of information about members, meetings, events and about how to become a member of RG. Our website alone will not attract new members. The people we need don’t work like that anymore. They are now finding and engaging with each other through social networking groups, the main one for business being LinkedIn.

One of the actions from our strategy workshop was to create a LinkedIn group for RG, to reach out and find people who sooner or later might become full members of RG. Launched just three weeks ago our group already has 122 members. Social networking is having a profound impact on the way that organisations interact with each other. Hitherto, organisations seeking access to the members of other organisations had to obtain the consent and active cooperation of those other organisations. In my capacity as your Chairman I approached the CEO of another membership organisation last year with a view of getting that person to promote awareness of the benefits of RG membership to their members. Despite assurances of support, nothing has happened yet.

What I realise now is that LinkedIn and similar groups enable people to engage directly with each other without needing permission or even awareness on the part of the organisations to which they belong. Furthermore, the kind of person who joins LinkedIn typically is the more pro-active type – the sort we want to attract to RG. One of the people who joined within the first week of launching the RG LinkedIn group came to our evening meeting in London on 12th April and is now serious about joining RG. Another is an independent consultant and a past chairman of the South East Region of the IBC – with many more contacts of his own, no doubt. The Chairman of the London and South East Region of AMBA has also joined our LinkedIn group together with numerous other impressive and influential people. Our LinkedIn group will become a ‘feeder tank’ from which we will gain new members for RG.

So what are the implications of this for RG? One in particular concerns the expectations of the members of RG as to the role of the Council. Hitherto, Council has been seen as having the primary responsibility for ensuring the continuing viability of RG. In the future I see the role of Council being mainly administrative – organising meetings, managing finances, processing membership, dealing with secretarial matters, and managing the website and LinkedIn group. Council will confirm the overall objectives and strategy for RG but responsibility for growing the membership to sustain RG will rest increasingly upon the collective efforts of individual members, by promoting RG to their contacts and to others through social networking groups such as LinkedIn.



Individual members add value to RG in other ways. Members are encouraged to give short presentations at our Saturday meetings on what they do, to help us get to know each other better. These presentations should continue but there is another, new opportunity for getting to know each other.

One aspect of the strategic plan is to identify training courses for members as part of achieving the *personal* and *practice development* objectives of RG. Some of these courses will be external but when we asked at the March meeting for a show of hands as to which members give training, a large proportion of you indicated that you do. So I see an opportunity to develop a portfolio of training courses that members would be willing to arrange for other members, both of RG itself and the members of the RG LinkedIn group. These would be organised formally and fees paid to cover costs and to pay the trainers. Council will be exploring this idea with you over the coming months.

I must at this point express my appreciation and thanks to Council and to our President, Calvert Markham, for supporting me so well. I remember thinking at the workshop last October how easy the members of Council were making it for me – their enthusiasm, talent and commitment has created a momentum that will carry RG forward. It has been a privilege and pleasure to know and work with them. On a more personal note, my father-in-law was taken into hospital last October and died last month. It has been a difficult six months for Hazel and me but we were both deeply moved and comforted by the numerous thoughtful and consoling messages of support we received from RG members, including the flowers sent to us by Council on your behalf.

To those of you who have never thought of serving on Council I urge you to consider doing so. That's when you discover and experience the full sense of pleasure, satisfaction and fellowship that RG can offer. I have been on Council for many years but the last 12 months have been extra special, having had the honour of following a long line of distinguished chairmen before me.

Chris Edge, who was due to be your next chairman, is to be honoured as the next Mayor of Merton if his party is successful in the council elections on 6th May. As this date is just before our AGM on the 8th May, David Peregrine-Jones has offered to be your chairman in his place, subject to his election at the AGM, and Chris may stand again in the future. I commend David to you. I know you will support him and your Council in the same splendid way you have supported me during the last 12 months. I am confident that RG is in safe hands. I look forward to continuing to play my part but I would like to finish, as I have done after every meeting, by thanking you all for being the Richmond Group and making it so very special.

A handwritten signature in purple ink, reading 'Hedley', written in a cursive style.

Hedley Basford

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