

Feedback

I attended a state Small Business Council dinner recently and was rewarded with lots of feedback about the issues concerning small businesses at the moment. The big Federal issues were amongst them but also issues like, insurance companies becoming defacto regulators of small business, processes and procedures when dealing with big business, i.e.: banks and utilities. Training apprenticeships being shortened became a big topic; the message was “it takes years of practice to develop the skills required in the trades”. Part time training also featured as a concern.

Insurance company demands

In response to corporate disasters like HIH and OneTel, legislation and regulation, along with codes of conduct within the insurance industry have been put into place forming a defacto regulatory system. Small business is often being told to alter operations and procedures or plant and equipment and even property to comply with insurance policy conditions. The workload is mounting and small business is once again feeling the pressure. Regulation overload at every level!

Industrial relations reform

IR reform is attractive to small business but only if it presents opportunities for all. There are so many rules for employing staff and running a business these days any relief will be welcome. Australian Workplace Agreements provide flexibility for both the employer and the employee, there are opportunities to change “normal” work practises to suit the needs of the customer and ensure a better they suit the life style of the employee. After all there are skill shortages currently and in the future the workforce will be shrinking when compared to output, demand for good staff will be high.

Competition

Competition was regularly brought up; the big retail outlets; Coles and Woolworths were mentioned regarding the sale of liquor and pharmacy’s in supermarkets. The emphasis of their argument is service, especially when attention to detail is so important as it is in the pharmaceutical world.

Red tape

The big issue as always is red tape, small business owners are fearful of further procedures being dumped on their desks. We collect tax, both PAYG and GST, collect and distribute superannuation and now to more that one fund. We collect and forward statistics for Government; we garnishee wages for child support and administer licences by the dozen. On top of all this business pays tax and fees to every level of Government.

The point I'm making here is that business owners seem to have acquired the job of "Government Agent" and maybe it's time all Governments started to treat them as such and provide training, facilities and even reimbursement.

Surely, at least, there is a mutual obligation to help small business owners learn to deal with the business side of their operations most especially compliance.

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