
From: Henry Staunton [GRO]
Sent: Thur 07/12/2023 6:55:07 PM (UTC)
To: Diane Blanchard [GRO]
Subject: Saf feedback - CONFIDENTIAL

I thanked Saf for the excellent contribution he made to the business , including at Board meetings . Board colleagues specifically commented that his insights on the business were very helpful in understanding the issues we face . I encouraged him , though , to focus more on the " strategic " aspects of those issues . I asked if he had any observations on the conduct of the Board and related issues .

He thought that Rachel was , perhaps , " over procedural " . He noted that she suggested that I leave the Board when a tangential issue involving WH Smith was discussed . I said that I thought she was just wanting the matter to be aired . He was upset that he was kept outside the NomCo when business had moved on from his reelection . I apologised for the incident but Rachel did not . He accepted ,however , that no further action needs to be taken .

He was much much more concerned about the culture of JB and the Investigations team . he thought not much had changed over ten years . He felt strongly that Investigations needed to come out of the Legal area under Ben Foat . There was not sufficient PM involvement . Perhaps an Advisory Council of 4/5 PMs might be the final arbiter . I said this may be just too difficult to convene . As an alternative it could that one PM who was either the direct report of JB or a sounding board for whoever was JB's boss . He was v critical of Ben and Legal . They were still treating PMs as guilty unless proved otherwise

With respect to Retail he thought Nick and I might have held Martin more to account for the lack of progress on DMB closures and SSKs . He felt the SSK presentation to the Board was " not entirely truthful " . Morrisons, the Coop , WH Smith and other strategic partners were very keen on SSKs particularly after the Min Wage increase . He thought that strategic partners may demand the SSKs for free but PMs may have to pay . I said that I had not heard this . As a PM he would have to say that " Martin was just not good enough " and he seemed equally unimpressed by one or two subordinates . (He referred to the poor performance at the Inquiry of Elaine Caldwell ? - that is what happens if the staff are not up to it .) I put in context the difficulties placed on Martin and his team but Saf did not move his position .

Throughout Saf wanted to emphasise his support for the Board and the senior team .

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