

# FROM UNDERDOG TO ADVANTAGE

## THE POWER OF PEOPLE PLANNING IN SMALL BUSINESS

By Tara Preston, based on a presentation by Therese Ravell, Impact HR

When we think about what drives success in a nursery business, be it retail, wholesale, or production, we often focus on stock, customers, and sales. But as HR strategist, Therese Ravell reminded us in her standout presentation at the IGC Conference, none of that works without a solid people plan.

In fact, she challenged every attendee to stop and reflect:

**"Do you have a people plan in place? Because without one, your sales, marketing, and financial plans will eventually grind to a halt."**

### Why Small is a Competitive Advantage

While larger businesses may have scale and resources, Therese argues that small businesses have something far more powerful - the ability to communicate quickly, build trust rapidly, and implement change almost immediately.

"You are not Bunnings. And that's a good thing," she said. "You have the power to create consistent, memorable experiences through effective team communication and leadership. That's your edge."

### What Should a People Plan Include?

A strong people plan is more than just recruitment. It is a strategic framework that aligns your workforce with your business goals while protecting your operations and enhancing employee engagement.

### Here are six essential elements to include:

**Recruitment** - Who you hire, how you attract them, cultural fit, and inclusive hiring practices

**Remuneration** - Fair wages, incentives, superannuation (retirement contributions), leave benefits

**Training & Development** - Ongoing learning, upskilling, and career growth opportunities

**Performance Management** - Setting clear expectations, giving feedback, resolving issues fairly

**Communication** - Clear instructions, regular check-ins, aligned team culture

**Workplace Safety** - WHS compliance, mental health support, risk management, updated policies

**Tip:** Include KPIs such as turnover rate, time-to-hire, or engagement scores to track your plan's effectiveness.





"Most small businesses skip this because they're too busy. But skipping it costs you time, money, and staff loyalty," Therese noted.

Download our People Planning Checklist here:



### Feedback is a Gift (Even When It's Awkward)

One of the most memorable moments came through Therese's personal story: as a young exchange student in Japan, she confidently used a phrase in Japanese that she thought meant "May I sit here?" but actually meant something wildly inappropriate due to a minor mispronunciation.

The lesson? Without timely, honest feedback, small mistakes can turn into costly ones.

"We avoid giving feedback because it feels uncomfortable," Therese said. "But feedback is a gift. We give gifts to people we care about."

She recommends:

- Give feedback in private
- Lead with observations, not accusations
- Frame feedback with solutions and collaboration in mind

### The Power of Clear Instructions

In a powerful demonstration, Therese asked attendees to "draw a dog." Unsurprisingly, every drawing was different. When she added step-by-step instructions and visual cues, the results became consistent and accurate.

"When we say, 'go sell that plant,' we are giving them as much context as 'draw a dog,'" she said. "Instead, train them with scripts. Observe your top performer and turn their approach into a system."

This is how McDonald's does it and it works.

### Sales Through Service – Retail Relevance

Therese encouraged nurseries to teach staff suggestive selling techniques that are helpful, not pushy:

- "Would you like some potting mix with that?"

- "These plants pair really well, would you like me to grab one?"

Scripts and prompts aligned with customer needs like seasonal tips, potting accessories, or mulch bundles can turn one-time buyers into loyal, returning customers.

### Three Final Reminders

Therese closed with three takeaways for every small business leader:

1. **Feedback is a gift** – Plan it, wrap it well, and give it often.
2. **Clarity beats correction** – Guide up front to reduce the need to fix later.
3. **Predictable patterns lead to performance** – Use systems, scripts, and consistency to drive service excellence.

Whether you lead a team of three or thirty, remember: success isn't about size it's about structure, support, and communication. A great people plan isn't just nice to have it's your secret weapon.

Ready to get started? Create a people planning checklist or connect with an HR advisor to start building your plan today.