



**The 10 year journey creating a great  
place to work**  
by Jim Hayward, Baringa Partners

*Baringa Partners - proud to be awarded 1<sup>st</sup> place in The Great Place to Work® Institute's 'Best Workplaces Programme', 2010*

*“Being a great place to work is the cornerstone of our success. Our people-centred culture, which we work very hard to maintain, helps us attract, develop and retain the most talented and experienced people in our industry. At the same time we are working with many of the leading companies in our sectors to deliver some of their most complex and challenging projects. We have learnt that strong people engaged in fulfilling work within a Great Place to Work environment can be hugely powerful. It is this virtuous circle that is propelling our business forward.”* Mohamed Mansour, Managing Partner, Baringa Partners.

## **The 10 Year journey creating a Great Place to Work**

by Jim Hayward, founder of Baringa Partners

2010 marks Baringa Partners’ tenth anniversary . From the very beginning, we have put our people at the heart of everything we do. Indeed, we believe that creating a great place to work is a defining factor in organisational success.

Attracting, developing and inspiring the best people to do their best possible work, ensures that a positive cycle of recruitment, delivery and growth is maintained. Organisations that develop strong, empowering cultures benefit financially from reduced staff churn, a higher number of recruiting referrals and ultimately better, more profitable, contracts.

Everyone at Baringa Partners, from our new starters to our senior management, is involved in developing a strong, inclusive organisation that attracts the most talented people in our industry, and encourages them to produce exemplary results for our clients.

We are very proud that our tenth anniversary coincides with us being awarded 1<sup>st</sup> place in The Great Place to Work® Institute's 'Best Workplaces Programme'. In this paper we reflect on some of the structures and processes we have put in place over the past decade that have helped make Baringa Partners a great place to work.

But of course we don’t want to rest on our laurels. Creating a great place to work is an ongoing process and the activity that feeds into it needs to be reviewed continuously to make sure that our initiatives are relevant for everyone, and are challenged and refreshed if necessary. Indeed we’re already looking forward to the feedback from this year’s Great Place to Work® survey as a source of inspiration for next year’s activities.

### **2000**

#### **Putting people at the heart of our culture**

As part of our core philosophy, we made a deliberate decision to make our employees the foundation of our entire business, underscoring our commitment to creating a positive and stimulating working environment for everyone at Baringa.



Fundamentally, creating a great place to work is simply the right thing to do if you want to feel good about what you do. But more than that, it is the cornerstone of being an employer of choice, regardless of the business and sector the organisation is in. It sounds straightforward enough, but that simplicity can be deceptive. Paradoxically, it is often harder for consultancy-type organisations for whom attracting, retaining and deploying a high calibre of individual is fundamental to success, and the bottom line is measured in pounds per head.

The challenge is to find a way of working that services both client demands and employee needs. Without adequate planning or stated guidelines it is too easy to fall into habits that focus almost exclusively on client service and fail to take into account the commitments that people have outside work. However, since winning new business depends on the quality of people, the long-term view must be to maintain a consistent and uncompromising focus on getting the right people into your organisation. That focus ensures that the foundations for an attractive workplace are laid.

*“All our senior people are highly involved in every recruiting decision we make. We use personal networks, selecting the best people we have worked with, alongside more traditional methods of finding new talent. Recruiting in this way makes a difference to the psychological contract Baringa has with its employees: emphasis is placed not just on ensuring staff are suitable for the organisation, but that the organisation is suitable for staff. The company provides a budget for all new prospective employees to be taken out socially to understand more about the company.”* Mohamed Mansour, Managing Partner, Baringa Partners.

## **2001**

### **Emphasising the importance of clear communication and face-to-face meetings**

As a consultancy organisation helping companies develop and deliver key elements of their business strategy, our people spend the majority of their time on site, working alongside clients.

Establishing a strong sense of community is undoubtedly a challenge when your people are working hard at a variety of disparate locations all over Europe. We quickly recognised that the traditional view of the workplace wouldn't work for us. So we intentionally focused on keeping our office infrastructure to a minimum, and our investment in our staff to a maximum.

We established a distinctive flat hierarchy that allows for the free flow of information around the organisation. Often this information sharing is unplanned – for instance passed on from senior management during conversation over drinks or dinner. Ad hoc emails communicate specific issues, celebrate recent wins or notify the company about key work completed. There are also informal channels such as dinners, conference calls and social occasions including company away days.



More formally, we introduced six-weekly meetings in a central location to keep our employees up to date with company events, meet new joiners and celebrate personal achievements. Twice a year Baringa Partners hosts a weekend away for employees and their partners. These typically include a company update and teambuilding activity as well as an informal dinner and dance. Baringa Partners also established a company newsletter that is put together by the staff, for the staff.

With no big central office where everyone gets together round the coffee machine, establishing this interactive infrastructure was essential to creating the open, honest and consistent communication needed to build trust and a sense of community.

## **2002**

### **Introducing career advisors**

In many organisations everyone reports into a line manager, their line manager reports into a business manager and so on up the chain. With our people focused on client service and delivery at multiple locations, working within many different environments, across a variety of teams and projects, we knew that this sort of traditional hierarchy wouldn't be practical for us.

We recognised the need to put in place a structure that would ensure consistency and continuity for our people, in terms of their relationship with Baringa, even when project teams and client focus are constantly changing.

So in 2002 we ensured that all staff members were assigned a career advisor as part of the induction process who would act as a mentor throughout the individual's time at Baringa, providing guidance, identifying opportunities and training, and evaluating career progress.

In addition, as our people progress through the organisation, we work hard to ensure they have unfettered access to advice and help from senior people, who work closely alongside them with no distinction by rank or position.

## **2003**

### **Showing appreciation through personalisation**

Everyone likes to be thanked, and appreciating the contribution made by individuals to a business often needs to be no more complicated than that. It is one of those things that is almost unnoticed until it is not done.

However, we really wanted to ensure that our employees actually felt appreciated for the hard work they had put in over and above the traditional financial and promotion-based recognition. So we began to bring in ad hoc gifts for going the extra mile. Christmas presents are planned and personalised in order to demonstrate a level of thought on our behalf: memory cards for a keen photographer, Amazon vouchers for book lovers, good



quality wine for wine buffs, and vouchers from a furniture store for an employee moving house have all featured.

In addition, celebrating success is a key way to motivate people. Baringa gives a quarterly award of £500 to an individual, based on nominations from within the company, who has demonstrated an exceptional contribution to the company's core values, with annual awards for Team of the Year, the Star Player, One to Watch and Cheerleader. Teams hitting project milestones mark the achievement with drinks and dinners.

## **2004**

### **Staff satisfaction survey**

Small companies inevitably have a strong culture, built on the personalities of the founders who established the firm with a particular purpose and sense of differentiation. But there comes a point when it stops being scalable, as 'new' people outnumber the initial founders and torch-bearers. As our company grew, it became more important to keep our finger on the pulse of morale within the organisation and to make sure we were creating the next generation of torch-bearers.

In 2004, we introduced a staff satisfaction survey to provide us with a structured internal measure of our success in creating a great place to work, giving all our employees an official forum to share their views and air any concerns. The survey was also a vital tool for us to ensure we met our aim of keeping a community feel throughout Baringa Partners. The results of the survey help us to try and understand, right down to the last individual, what employees' perspectives are and ensure that we continue to build a culture that embraces the many different types of individual that make up the company now.

## **2005**

### **Establishing a buddy system**

While the career advisor system that we set up in 2002 was working well for existing employees, our employee satisfaction survey revealed that we could do more to help new starters integrate into Baringa. We recognised that starting a new job can be unsettling and we wanted to create a support network tailored specially to people joining us.

We devised the buddy system, so that new joiners would feel comfortable with the choice they made, helping them feel at home as quickly as possible and doing our best to ensure that they would have every chance of success at Baringa Partners.

We decided to assign every new joiner a buddy for their first year with Baringa as a complement to the more traditional support role of the career advisor. Today the role of the buddy is to provide advice and guidance of an unofficial nature, and to generally "check in on" the new joiner from time to time. The buddy - usually someone of a similar level - meets the employee within their first week and a small budget is allocated to support informal drinks or a meal with the new joiner.

## **2006**

### **Creating business units to engender stronger teamwork**

By 2006 we were 50 people strong and had a turnover of £10 million a year, we'd become medium sized company in a relatively short space of time and while Baringa has always had a strong set of core values, we wanted to be sure we were doing everything we could to guide and inspire our people to continuously develop the right behaviours and qualities to grow themselves, our business and our client base.

An area highlighted as part of our employee survey was that people wanted to feel part of a focused team. So based on this feedback we took a measured decision to split our company into separate Financial Services and Energy business units to help foster a strong sense of identity among different teams. We were careful to make sure that our people still felt a valued part of the company as a whole, but we have found that the team approach means they also benefit from a closer allegiance to those colleagues with whom they work on a daily basis.

Today our business units are focused on Energy, Utilities and Financial Services allowing our employees to be part of a specialist team and develop deep market-focused expertise. At the same time we invest a lot of effort into numerous initiatives to ensure our cultural identity is never diluted.

### **2007 Entering the Great Place to Work awards**

In 2007 we made the decision to enter the global Best Workplaces Programme, the largest assessment of its kind with more than 1.5 million employees across 40 countries taking part every year.

We felt that having placed people at the heart of our business and devoted so much energy to making them feel that they belong, and to reinforcing their importance to us every single day, it would be extremely valuable to have some sort of external assessment against which we could benchmark our efforts.

Companies entering the Great Places to Work awards are ranked according to the results of an employee survey, which ensures that employees make a substantial contribution to the final ranking, and a management questionnaire that provides an analysis of the values, policies and practices that support an organisation's culture.

So although our internal employee satisfaction survey tests how are we doing against previous years and how are we compare to previous employers, The Best Places to Work Programme allows us to assess how are we doing externally, not only against our competitors, but also against other companies from a variety of industries. Indeed in our quest to be an employer of choice we place great emphasis on being open to new ideas and ways of doing things from other sectors.



Since we first entered the Great Places to Work Award, we have been consistently recognised among the top twenty Best Workplaces in the UK, achieving a second-place ranking in 2008 and 2009 in addition to 2010's first place ranking.

In 2010 we were also named as the 11<sup>th</sup> best place to work in Europe in the small and medium companies' category, won the Most Trusted Leadership Excellence Award and were finalists in six special award categories, including The Workplace Wellbeing Excellence Award, the Learning & Leadership Sustainability Excellence Award and the Corporate Responsibility Excellence Award.

We are quietly proud of these accolades, which are a crucial external measure of our success as an organisation.

## **2008**

### **Giving a Senior Partner responsibility for people**

By 2008 Baringa Partners had grown significantly from a small consulting company to a 120 people strong globally recognised industry leader sought after by the most ambitious players in the energy market and financial services industry. The culture we had engendered had provided the platform on which that growth was based and we knew from the employee satisfaction survey and our success in the Great Place to Work awards that we were doing a lot of things well.

However, we wanted to stay true to our core values and use them to continue to inspire our people to help make Baringa Partners the best consulting company for both our clients and our people. With this in mind we put ownership of our people function into the hands of a senior partner in order to maintain that focus and also as a mark of the importance that we place on maintaining our Great Place to Work culture.

## **2009**

### **Empowering senior managers**

Baringa Partners has always had a flat organisational structure and in 2009, we reinforced this approach by empowering our senior managers to take ownership of key business areas. So as well the consulting job that they do, senior managers take responsibility for a number of company focused support activities such as marketing, recruiting, training, company forums, and running the employee satisfaction survey.

We deliberately made the decision not to have a separate support function sitting outside our client focused work who, in a more traditional company, would typically manage these areas. We wanted to provide our senior managers with more opportunity to shape the way we ran the company, take on new skills and offer them greater variety in their jobs over and above their core consulting roles. We also felt that our senior managers could add considerable value to these functions. After all, if your day job is consulting you actually know what consulting is all about and what clients are demanding from us as an organisation. This puts



you in the perfect position to understand the drivers for recruitment or the specific areas to be addressed through training.

## **2010**

### **Enhancing the CSR function**

We had always run an informal corporate social responsibility programme which had been a prominent feature of life at Baringa for a number of years with individuals and teams taking part in voluntary work and charity events. But based on the feedback from our 2009 Great Place to Work award entry, we decided that we could and should do more, and set about creating a more focused CSR function. We were keen to advance our role as a corporate citizen with a variety of initiatives such as taking on student interns and donating time, expertise and money to charity.

As a result we have built a relationship with four charities for whom we are participating in a number of separate fundraising activities. In addition, in 2010 Baringa Partners will hold two volunteer days which allocate time for individuals to get involved in dedicated charities, do something valuable for the wider community and have a lot of fun.

### **And beyond...**

Creating a Great Place to Work isn't straightforward. It's a constant challenge. But we believe it's worth all the hard work and that being a successful company and creating an enjoyable working environment are intrinsically linked. Indeed, our success has been built on the quality of our people and the culture they've developed.

To find out more about how to turn your organisation into a Great Place to work visit [www.baringa.com](http://www.baringa.com) or email [jim.hayward@baringa.com](mailto:jim.hayward@baringa.com).