

# ABBOTSTONE BARN: IN ACTION

*Sophie Grenville Baring has over 30 years experience working with leadership teams, has been Managing Director of two consultancies and now co leads the development of The Grange Hampshire. As part of the Estate's offering Sophie has developed Abbotstone Barn, an offsite retreat space, that draws on her wide experience of encouraging businesses to have the critical conversations they need to achieve their ambition.*

## Abbotstone Barn

In a world where much is done digitally, well-facilitated time for leaders to nurture strategies, relationships and skills has never been more important, particularly in periods of change and growth.

Exceptional off-sites, extended meetings and leadership experiences involve some simple but surprisingly hard to find ingredients : it boils down to being able to relax easily, eating well, lots of natural light, opportunities for exercise and fresh air and knowing that you will be able to get hold of what you need. Only then can you access the inspiration that lies beneath the surface, listen to one another and get focused on what's most important.

Our environment and our people mean that we can help you orchestrate an experience that will work for you.

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## The Power of an Offsite with Moore Blatch's Top Team

Having worked with leadership teams of both large and small organisations (FTSE 100 companies to a ten-person business), we notice they lack the time and space to have the conversations they need to have.

We hear multiple reasons why :

"we don't have time we are too busy running our business";  
 "we can't afford it"; "off-sites are for big businesses indulging in management consultant speak"; "the last time we did that it was a waste of time, we didn't come away with any decisions"  
 ... and the list goes on...

However, an excellently structured off-site with the right amount of preparation and momentum in the follow-up, can make the difference between succeeding and failing for a team, whatever kind of organisation they are part of.

Moore Blatch's A Partner group spent time together at Abbotstone Barn and Farmhouse looking at how they need to work as a leadership team, in order to achieve their ambition for the business. There were some essential ingredients that made their time together productive.



## 1: STRONG FOUNDATIONS

There is work to be done before you ask a team to invest significant time. Preparing the ground well makes a huge difference to what happens on the day. There are lots of possibilities for useful preparation from getting feedback on the team, to doing a review of their biggest challenges, to researching the trends that will affect their business.

With the Moore Blatch participants we interviewed them separately to get their perspective on the business and their hopes and fears as individuals. This meant that they had a chance to reflect and those running the conversation were aware of any issues in advance.

This knowledge is crucial to create the right structure for the session and prioritise what's most important to discuss.

*“The interview prior to the session got me thinking in a different way about our team and how we were operating. It made me think afresh.”*

*“Given that there were some difficult things to tackle setting the right framework and behaviours for us as a group made for a much more productive conversation. We got through a lot.”*

## 2: THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

Intense business conversations need spaces that get the balance right between being fit for purpose on the one hand and not too corporate on the other. Abbotstone Barn is a large area with plenty of natural light, comfortable chairs and flexible spaces to talk, sit and eat. There are multiple ways of displaying information from purpose built moveable screens to plenty of wall space.

It is in the heart of The Grange Hampshire Estate, with ample outside space and easy walking – it is a breath of fresh air literally and metaphorically.

The ability to include more informal sessions are also key: Moore Blatch were served delicious, plentiful food and snacks ranging from home made granola bars to estate venison for dinner in the attached Farm House. Time for more unstructured events such as a glass of estate-produced sparkling wine on the portico of the Grange, alongside a more formal agenda, creates an atmosphere where relationships are enhanced and some deeply entrenched issues addressed.



*“We had conversations that we had never had before as a team”*

*“Abbotstone Barn, located such in a beautiful countryside setting, helped deliver a great board level strategy day for us.”*

*“Great location, which allowed for a functional and relaxed environment, that forced full switch off from the day-to-day to consider the big picture strategic issues.”*

*“Excellent food at the right level - from good coffee to a delicious lunch to plenty of snacks to keep us going, also lots of places we could get some fresh air and take a break. It all really helped us to stay focused on what could have been a very draining day. It meant we could make the most of the time we had together.”*

### 3: SOMEONE TO FACILITATE THE CONVERSATION

It can be very powerful to have an impartial person able to structure and run the conversation, who knows the context, and the business outcomes. Sophie Grenville Baring and the team provided that support for Moore Blatch.

They kept the conversation on track and landed agreements, actions and further conversations that needed to happen.

It's a skill that involves everything from understanding human relationships and dynamics, to knowing how to maintain the energy and being able to challenge senior people. Some of it is simply about chemistry and sensing when to be serious and when to reduce the pressure with some levity.



*“We were very well led, drawing out issues from us and capturing the outputs and agreements. This element we struggle with on our own. The session was extremely well structured.”*

*“The facilitators were brilliant at crystallising things, had a real understanding of our group and they made it hard for us to ignore stuff.”*

*“Having dinner in a private setting after a day of good discussions, meant that we ended up having a conversation we had never had before, but needed to.”*

### 4: MAKING IT COUNT AFTERWARDS

Even when significant things happen, agreements are made, relationships are improved and there is a solid list of actions.

The day to day running of things can get in the way and hinder progress and there is always more to talk about.

Being clear about what is going to happen to ensure change and who is going to meet when, are fundamental to making it count once everyone is back in the workplace. Therefore it is essential to structure this in, and give yourself enough time before the close of the session to make that happen.

The Moore Blatch team left with a set of agreements, a clear action plan with allocated responsibilities and an agenda of things they still needed to work on.

*“We needed the discipline of getting clear on exactly who is taking charge of what, to make the most of investing this time together.”*

In summary, getting away from the day to day with the right amount of planning, in the right environment pays dividends for your business whatever size you are. To make the most of your next off-site, strategy away day, leadership meeting, training course ask yourself the following:

**What are we wanting to achieve? What would a good result look like? What would a great result look like? What would make the investment of time and money worthwhile? What longer term impact are we wanting it to have? How much time and money do we need (not how much have we got)?**