

## **Business Performance Improvement: from the cradle to the grave**

The relationship between business and your employees is best viewed in light of that great philosophy of the Cooperative society – “*from the cradle to the grave.*”

- Recruit only those people that meet your defined standard, not just the best of the bunch.
- Have a defined standard. Do the work to create a behavioural and competency profile and use it to recruit and then develop your people.
- The experienced people that you recruit are just raw material until you invest the time and effort to make them yours.
- Recruit a range of people from raw recruits through to the fully experienced to create balanced teams that are able to develop and evolve.
- Put everyone through the induction programme.
- Commit to a programme of ongoing training and development.
- If appropriate link your development programme to recognised qualifications and get it accredited.
- Appraisal, coaching and mentoring are all a part of the ongoing commitment that you should make to develop your people.

When we planned this, the fifth in our series of new-year messages, we were going to cover training and development and the importance of continuing to invest in this even through tough economic times. While it is still the plan to cover this, a recent event reported widely in the news has created a new context for this item. “*Chesley Sullenberger, the US Airways pilot safely landed a stricken plane in the Hudson River*”

This took me back to the first thing that I embarked upon after A-levels; I went to train as an airline pilot. The selection process took some six months, it involved at least 10 working days and included; psychometric and psychological tests, two medicals, a week of practical flying selection exercises and interviews. At the end of this process 42 of us were chosen out of over 7,000 original applicants. They actually needed 60 new recruits that year but only 42 met the standard which leads to lesson number one, **only recruit those that meet your standards not just the best of the bunch.** Having been selected we

## **Business Performance Improvement: from the cradle to the grave**

commenced an 18 month programme of intense training with frequent examinations. I failed a flying test (not doing a solo landing to be exact) after completing 25% of the course. Imagine if Captain Sullenberger had an inherent weakness which made him poor at landing! It doesn't bear thinking about which leads to lesson two, **don't be frightened to admit you have made a recruitment mistake.**

So, I now needed a new career and I was fortunate enough, again after a rigorous selection process, to get a job as a trainee sales person with Olivetti. I say lucky because in seven very enjoyable years, I attended a total of some 40 weeks of training and later realised that I had received what amounted to an MBA. It is for sure that when I started my first company in 1980, I quickly realised that I had a pretty complete set of skills, knowledge and experience from both the training and the practical application of the lessons to real life situations.

So for me a third lesson is about having chosen carefully you then need to **invest in continual training and development.** I stayed with Olivetti for seven years because they invested in me.

It could be said that employing already skilled and experienced people is a perfectly valid recruitment policy however there are some significant issues with this approach. Firstly, if everyone recruits experienced people, who is going to train the raw recruits and give them the opportunity to become experienced? Secondly, fishing in an ever shrinking pool tends to compromise selection criteria which impacts on quality. Thirdly, this puts pressure on salaries which may not appear to be a problem at the moment but you are probably still struggling with the legacy of overpayment from previous years.

There are numerous other issues arising from the above recruiting policy but I will focus on just two more that I think are really at the crux of this whole issue. Recruiting experienced people tricks you into believing that you have got the finished article, however they are only experienced in the ways of other companies and often arrive with a degree of arrogance about how good they are. You still need to treat these people as raw material that must be developed by you if you want them to become a committed part of your company and its culture. The other issue is about loyalty. Experienced people may feel that you need them more than they need you and may tend to be loyal to

## **Business Performance Improvement: from the cradle to the grave**

themselves first and to you second. If, on the other hand, you recruit people who need developing and you put time and effort into them they are more likely to be loyal and are much more likely to grow to match your ideal criteria for an employee in their job role.

You may well ask why I have spent most of this message, which is supposed to be about training and development, talking about recruitment. Investing time and money on training and development is a simple decision to make when you are certain of the quality and commitment of your people otherwise you could easily be risking that investment going to waste.

There has been growing media interest in the amount of hours worked in the UK and in particular hours of unpaid overtime. It is a simple fact that well-trained people can do their jobs more effectively, thus reducing the need for overtime. The overtime then becomes more of an indication of pulling together to get the necessary jobs done to keep the company in business, than a reflection of a desire for an increased pay packet, or a reaction to poor employment conditions.

So, once you have defined your behavioural and competency profiles for different job roles, you can use it not only for new recruitment but also for assessing your existing people so that you can put them through the right development programmes as well.

The basic building blocks of a development programme are as follows:

- A thorough induction programme, typically lasting for 3 – 5 days. If you have never had an induction programme, it is a good move to create a stripped down version of the one you will use for new recruits and get everyone of your existing employees to attend it. This way everyone will be singing from the same hymn sheet.
- People need to be trained to understand what you do, how you do it, and what needs to be achieved. This would normally involve training people in your products, services and propositions and your internal systems. This will need to be tuned to different job functions so, for example, a sales person might need 3 days of product training while a service engineer might need a month and an accounts clerk might need a four hour overview.

## **Business Performance Improvement: from the cradle to the grave**

- Each person then needs skills training appropriate to their job function. The best way to deliver skills training is through a series of interventions spread over time starting with basic level skills and building up through various layers to advanced skills. The various levels can be linked to qualifications and can also become a part of the promotion process.
- Another important aspect of developing your people is a well designed and diligently executed appraisal process. Whatever system you decide to use, you must make sure that anyone conducting an appraisal is properly trained to do this important task.
- Finally, ongoing coaching and mentoring are very important activities as part of the overall development regime. As with appraisals, your managers and leaders must be trained to coach and mentor and you must allow them the time to do it.

The above is not as onerous as it may seem being laid out in these stark bullet points. While I do not like to generalise on things like this, a good guideline would be to expect to spend on average 15 days per annum training, coaching, mentoring and appraising your people which is something like 7% of the working year. Junior people and new recruits will need more time while more experienced people will need less but on balance, 7% is a good average. A carefully thought out and well executed personal development programme should easily return more than it costs.

**See your people as people**, not human capital or any of the other unpleasant phrases that seem to be in common use today. Commit to them and they will commit to you and at difficult times like those we are experiencing now, you really need a committed and loyal team behind you.

**Phil Shipperlee**  
**CEO**

Performative plc, St Mary's Court, The Broadway, Amersham, Buckinghamshire, HP7 0UT  
Tel: 01494 582 084 Fax: 01494 582 020  
Web: [www.performative.net](http://www.performative.net) Email: [enquiries@performative.net](mailto:enquiries@performative.net)  
Registered Address: 30 City Road, London, EC1Y 2AB  
Registered in England. Registered Number: 4204369