

Improving Employees' Skills and Confidence at Tesco

Tesco places a high importance on its staff. "Looking after our people so that they can look after our customers is a central part of our company values". This was what was behind Wokingham Tesco's decision to use a local college to deliver literacy training.

When the college first approached Tesco, the co-ordinator knew that Tesco were expanding fast and they were having difficulties recruiting staff to cope with this expansion. The courses that were offered were designed to improve employees' literacy skills so they could access in-house training.

Benefits of Training

Anne Lee the Training Manager at Tesco explains. "If people get more confidence or their skills get a little bit better, then we might be able to use that on the shop floor or within the company and we could offer them a bigger role later on. With low confidence they might not have even thought about a bigger role."

This was not the only advantage of training. Anne Lee got involved with the training in order to "give [the employees] a chance to do some learning which they wouldn't get to do otherwise. "

One of the unexpected benefits of the training was improved teamwork. "People tend to work in their own department. Having different people meet up helped. They probably wouldn't have joined in together otherwise. All put in the same situation, it didn't make you feel inferior and they were really supportive of each other."

Anne also found there was improved customer service from those people who went on the training. "If you are not very confident you shy away and you don't really want to speak to people. If people think I can't read, then if customers ask them something they say 'I don't know'. Whereas now they are approaching the customers and speaking to them."

Sam Sugars, who is a General Assistant, attended one of the courses. At first she was very apprehensive about going on the training. "Someone asked me about it and I said, I'm not doing that you must be joking! But after starting the course I couldn't wait to get there." The biggest outcome for Sam was an increase in confidence. "I think people get the wrong impression of me because I can be a bit off sometimes, I think people think I come across as being quite rude and I don't mean to be. I am a lot more friendly now." She has now enrolled on an acting course at a local college. "Doing these courses gave me the confidence. I wouldn't have gone otherwise."

Another strength of these courses was having several tutors involved. The differing teaching styles helped those attending the course to learn a variety of techniques to approach their work. "Different approaches helped you learn in different ways."

Challenges

Setting up the training proved to be the biggest challenge during this course. Tesco were only prepared to go ahead with the training if it was offered to all staff, including the nightshift. To overcome this the college found a night-time tutor.

There was also pressure to get employees to attend the training. As Anne Lee pointed out it was difficult for some staff to get away "Especially from departments with a limited number of staff- when they have sickness and holidays. But then as Tesco we had made the commitment to the staff that we would let them go and it was up to us to let them go."

There were also negotiations that needed to be made around the timing of courses that would suit all staff. The store manager was involved in making sure the timing of the courses did not clash with busy periods in the store.

After the initial stigma that was attached to these courses, staff were so keen they came in on their days off to attend the courses. Eight people passed a national qualification in literacy and Tesco celebrated this success. Through word of mouth and the success of those who attended the course, staff are now asking for more training.