

# LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

*Open Learning pays dividends at Catering Partnership*

## FLEXIBILITY FOR MULTI-SITE TRAINING

When Lutterworth-based Catering Partnership set out to establish itself as

the UK's leading quality contract caterer, management recognised that the first priority was ensuring that every member of staff was fully committed to the challenge that lay ahead.



Catering Partnership employs 170 people and embraces twenty five sites across the UK.

The training initiative was to be a vital step in the company's growing commitment to quality. Training would also contribute to the achievement of its long-term Business Plan – to

profitably expand operations to 200 units over the next five years.

Catering Partnership sought the advice of Leicestershire Training and Enterprise Council which recommended an Open Learning scheme to be part-funded by the Employment Department's Business Growth Training programme.

### Identifying Training Needs

The initial task was to identify the company's training needs. An external consultant was called in to interview all senior managers and a selection of unit managers. Every other member of staff received a questionnaire which generated a 92% response rate.

Regular performance reviews emerged as the most common request. As a result, a package was designed specially for the company to train staff in 'How to Carry out a Performance Review'. This would enable senior managers to assess unit managers and unit managers to assess their staff in a cascade system.



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LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES CASE STUDY

## L E A R N I N G   T E C H N O L O G I E S

The training package incorporated:

- a workbook
- audio-cassette tapes
- tutorial support materials

and was designed so that staff could work at their own pace.

Versatility was vital to the success of the programme. With twenty five sites all over the UK and the peaks and troughs in activity that are a feature of many service industries, it was essential that the package could be used flexibly by staff.

An in-house project team was set up to supervise the training programme and to organise the flow of information needed for the performance reviews.

Joint Managing Director Harry Gadsden believes that the Open Learning approach was ideally suited to the needs of a multi-site organisation:

'What appealed to us about the scheme was that it enabled individual members of staff to take control of their own training. At the same time, knowing that every trainee was using the same material meant that consistency of message and training objectives was guaranteed.'

Staff were encouraged to study at any time during the day when there was a natural lull in activity. Catering Partnership's other Managing Director Arthur Oliver adds:

'It was not unusual to walk into a manager's office and find him or her absorbed in listening to one of the training tapes or using the workbook.'



**Immediate Business Benefits**

In the year immediately following the completion of the training programme, Catering Partnership experienced a dramatic 100% increase in annual profits – at a time when the recession was taking its toll in many sectors.

Management attribute the improvement in sales to the increased enthusiasm of staff in initiating special promotions and to more effective purchasing as managers became confident in being more selective with suppliers. In addition, the company's proven commitment to staff training has been a decisive factor in gaining new contracts.

Just as important, however, was the significant effect of the Open Learning scheme on the commitment and motivation of the company's personnel. In the twelve months of the training programme, staff turnover halved and 70% of unit managers and supervisory staff were promoted. This led to savings in recruitment costs, and expenditure associated with the employment of temporary and relief staff was reduced. Overall efficiency improved dramatically.

**Training as a catalyst for other business initiatives**

Catering Partnership's successful training programme led to the creation of a Mission Statement uniting corporate and individual objectives.

The success of the performance reviews has generated a whole series of business initiatives. Catering Partnership is already preparing for its next Open Learning programme using feedback generated by the performance reviews – now an annual event for every member of staff.

Staff commitment and motivation have improved to the extent that the company is now embarking on the 'Investors in People' initiative before applying for BS 5750. A Management Development Programme is also being implemented. Catering Partnership can now show that it is acting on its belief that people are its most important asset.

Catering Partnership's Open Learning initiative has proved to be a major success, achieving tangible business advantages at only a fraction of the cost of a traditional face-to-face training programme. The company now looks forward with confidence to the next phase of the challenge it has set itself.