

OPEN LEARNING

Open Learning in a Volatile Industry

GLEMBY'S FLEXIBLE TRAINING PROGRAMME EXCEEDS TARGETS

Hairdressing is a uniquely volatile industry which has traditionally attracted a predominantly young, mobile workforce. However, it also reflects the wider personnel and business challenges that face UK industry as a whole, whether in the manufacturing or service sector.



A study carried out in 1989 by the British Association of Professional Hairdressing Employers (BAPHE) set out to establish the long-term business effects of the industry's high staff turnover. It was suspected that the widespread problem of staff retention was leading to significant

and unnecessary expenditure for hairdressing companies across the country.

The conclusions of the report were unequivocal. Salon managers were often inadequately trained – a significant factor in the incidence of poor morale and staff retention. It was decided that a BAPHE member would pilot a training programme designed to improve staff commitment and salon efficiency in the hope of establishing more long-term business benefits.

Glembly (Europe) Ltd. agreed to carry out the training programme to be partly funded through the Employment Department's Business Growth Training Programme. As the subsidiary of US-based Glembly International, the company is one of the UK's leading hairdressing chains with over 130 salons in major department stores and speciality shops throughout the country.

In order to effectively measure the results of the programme, Glembly carried out an internal review of its own labour turnover. The results were dramatic – an annual overspend of £2 million was revealed,



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LEARNING METHODS CASE STUDY



attributable to recruitment, training and lost business. It was immediately evident that more effective management at salon level could have a major impact on company performance as a whole.

Managing Director Tony Rammelte gave his full commitment to the scheme, recognising the urgent need for a more structured and effective management skills training programme. Training, it was decided, should become an integral and important part of company culture.

Ambitious Targets for Training Initiative

The aims of the training programme were threefold, with two key priorities. The first was to achieve a 2% increase in gross profit at salon level. Secondly, the company wanted to see a 14% reduction in staff turnover. Finally, Glemby hoped to build a 70% rate for request clients – an ambitious target for a company

that had traditionally relied on customers 'dropping in' while shopping in the host store.

Of prime importance was the fact that the investment in training had to be justified through direct improvement in bottom line performance.

Open Learning Provides the Solution

Flexibility of the training solution was essential if the programme was to cater for the needs of the target group. In many respects, Glemby presented a classic Open Learning application – a large and heterogeneous group of trainees, spread across a wide geographical area and with varying levels of training and experience.

A cross-section of 50 salon managers was chosen for training from all over the UK. The Open Learning programme faced a real test.

O P E N L E A R N I N G

Staff loyalty is a precious commodity and at Glemby managers had a greater sense of their own worth to the company; many took pride in the fact that Glemby had invested in them and were ambitious about their own future with the company. In an increasingly competitive environment, the retention of capable and committed managers must be a major priority.

The Open Learning programme has led to the creation of a positive culture for Glemby's middle management tier and has proved how successful a flexible training programme can be as a catalyst for business growth.

All the salons involved in the scheme have retained the workbooks for ongoing use; some managers have voluntarily started to use them to train junior staff. Managing Director Tony Rammelte needs no convincing:

"We have always believed that improved business performance derives from happy, fulfilled and confident managers. The dramatic success of the Open Learning initiative – which was completed at a far lower cost than a conventional training programme – more than vindicates our confidence."

Bespoke Training Materials

Training Consultancy OTSU Ltd. was appointed to create a body of tailored materials which would be used with the control group of 50 salons within the Glemby network. The materials themselves were designed to have a shelf-life considerably longer than the two-year duration of the project.

Specific areas were targeted for the training initiative and a series of workbooks and complementary tapes created, covering:

- Customer Concerns
- Promotions and Product Knowledge
- Image and Responsibility
- Valuing Your Staff
- Recruitment and Interviewing
- Policies
- Petty Cash
- Money

Each workbook contained question and answer sections and lively cartoon illustrations. OTSU was closely involved with the training of managers in the effective use of the materials and with establishing effective monitoring and assessment procedures.

Divisional controllers and senior managers were chosen to act as mentors to salon managers using the Open Learning materials. In the event, most trainees required only minimal supervision and were able to work

successfully at their own pace and with little guidance.

Immediate and Ongoing Business Benefits

Glemby's Open Learning initiative was undertaken against a backdrop of deepening recession and rising unemployment. This meant that any benefits would be hard-won.

At the end of the two year programme, the performance of the 50 pilot salons was compared with that of other units. It was immediately clear that the two key targets had been more than met.

In the pilot salons staff turnover fell to only 68%.

Managing Director Tony Rammelte sees this as the real success of the programme, adding that almost 20% of the salons saw staff turnover drop to zero.

Even more dramatic was the effect on salon profitability which rose – by far more than the target 2% – from 6.6% to 12.7%.

Just as significant as these immediate benefits, however, was the effect of the Open Learning programme on the morale and motivation of the participating salon managers.

Trainees were unanimous in their praise for the scheme, reporting increased confidence and improved efficiency. For Glemby's Head Office this meant fewer telephone queries from salon managers and a lightening of the workload for divisional and central management tiers.