

Using Investors In People at Hillier Nurseries

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INTRODUCTION

When a new member of staff joins Hillier Nurseries they receive, as part of their induction package, a brief explanation of the Investor in People scheme and how it works in practice at Hillier Nurseries. When the induction material was first written, soon after the company achieved the award in January 1993, this was needed because few people had heard of the Investor in People initiative. Today, in the U.K., 7.75 million people work for organisations which have achieved Investors In People.

Hillier Nurseries was fortunate in being offered an early opportunity to obtain the award as part of a pilot scheme involving a small number of businesses in Hampshire. It seemed to be tailor-made for the company as it comprised a framework which would use the various personnel and training initiatives already in place at Hillier, and integrate them with the company's business objectives. It would also provide the scrutiny and deadline of an external assessment.

It took 18 months for the company to be ready for our first assessment. Hillier has 16 retail and production sites scattered across the south of England and it was felt important that the scheme was explained personally to everyone involved. The practical and common sense approach of the scheme made it easy to sell. It is vital that everyone in an organisation, from directors down, is behind the scheme.

THE BUSINESS PLAN

Hillier Nurseries was already developing a 5-year business strategy under the Department of Trade and Industry's Business Planning Initiative and the subsequent rolling Divisional plans have probably been the most beneficial part of the whole Investors In People (I.I.P.) process. A small team, drawn from across Hillier Nurseries, developed a Training and Development policy that set out what staff can expect throughout their career with Hilliers, from induction training onwards, with the aim of developing everyone to their fullest potential and provide the maximum job satisfaction. In addition, the company needed to identify from the business plans what staff development was needed to make the plans work. This formed the basis of detailed departmental plans and budgets. These can and do change during the year to take account of new staff or internal promotions. In cash terms, the company will have spent around £50,000 in this financial year. This is no more than the amount spent before the introduction of I.I.P. but the company believes it will achieve better results for the same amount.

THE ROLE OF I.I.P. FOR THE INDIVIDUAL STAFF MEMBER

Each member of staff should be aware of how they contribute to the overall plan by way of their personal objectives and the importance of their contribution. We do this by regular individual performance reviews when training and development needs can also be identified. Of course, many Hillier staff have been with the company for a long time and are highly skilled in what they do. We do not train for the sake of

it. Their needs could be linked to expansion of their role or changes in the way the company does things. New or younger staff will need more training input initially as they learn the skills required to meet the Hillier standard. A lot of development goes on without people realising it is happening. Everyone learns on the job, developing their skills and knowledge or learning from others, visiting other organisations, and attending conferences or trade shows. The list is endless. Training is going on somewhere in the company every day.

REQUIREMENT FOR INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

A key requirement of the I.I.P. standard is effective communication. Because of Hillier Nurseries' scattered locations, the company has not found it easy in the past to ensure everyone has access to complete and accurate information. Misunderstandings can even arise when people work side by side. The company believes it has made improvements in keeping all staff regularly informed of progress at company, division, and local level. Team briefings for each nursery section or garden centre are based on a Core Brief which comes from the monthly company board meeting. Newsletters, noticeboards and, now, email are also useful ways of getting the message across.

BENEFITS FOR THE COMPANY

At the company level, the benefits of I.I.P. have mainly resulted from the business planning exercise and seeing many of the targets achieved or surpassed due to better and more focussed management coupled with opportunities for individuals and teams to set their own objectives and initiate their own solutions to problems. There is more flexibility to react more quickly to customers' requirements — an emphasis on improving quality. Overall, there is now a confidence to make capital investment for the future.

CONCLUSION

Is all this training achieving its objectives? Is it value for money? Could it be done differently? These are the questions that are probably the most difficult to answer accurately or immediately — unless it's the gaining of a practical skill that can be put to use instantly. The benefits of a management course can take some time to show in the results but the I.I.P. standard does ask management to evaluate the benefits and, although it's not easy, there is plenty of guidance on sensible ways to do this.

There is nothing particularly novel about the I.I.P. Standard. Most well run organisations use these or similar principles. What is different is that at regular intervals there is an in-depth unbiased external view of how well you train and develop the people who make up your business to make it more productive and profitable.