

WOMEN AND THE FUTURE



We all agree that people are our biggest asset and in the current climate, Simon Jones argues we are going to depend upon that asset more than ever before...

As the UK faces increasing competition from overseas and the world enters a period of economic uncertainty, it is vital that the talents of the whole population are fully realised in order for the UK to achieve its world class ambitions for the future.

Demographic change is

affecting the profile of the workforce creating an increasingly important need for employers to effectively harness the talent of women and help them make the most of their working lives. Many women missed out on educational opportunities in the past and ensuring that they can access training opportunities and 'up-



CASE STUDY

A.A. Security Limited

The security industry is not well-known for its record in employing and developing women. Abnormal working hours and old-fashioned attitudes represent barriers to many women who might have considered a career in the sector, but fast-growing A.A. Security has worked with Investors in People to challenge this perception and develop its reputation as an employer that helps all its employees broaden their skills.

Working with Investors in People helped managing director, Wilson Chowdhry, transform the fast growing business into one that leads its industry in terms of the training and development plans it offers its employees. In addition, to introduce and encourage women into the industry and challenge misconceptions, A.A. Security holds women-only classes run by female instructors. The company works with local job centres to brief them on the benefits and opportunities available to women who join the industry, and it has organised single parent seminars to explain how they could balance their working hours with spending time with their children.

For those working in the company, A.A. Security is passionate about ensuring their employees have flexibility in the hours they work, offering childcare support and making sure that the amount of hours they work in a week really does suit employees. Wilson believes that if you don't work hard in areas like this people simply won't hang around.

In an industry with high turnover, this is important. A.A. Security's customers get better service from consistency in personnel and Wilson believes that working with Investors in People has helped the company develop the policies and support that mean its turnover rate is just 9% compared to an industry average of 35%.

As it approaches its 15th anniversary, A.A. Security has already grown to 270 employees. The economic climate may be challenging, but A.A. Security has the customer service awards to show that developing its staff and broadening its workforce keeps you ahead of the pack.

skill' in the workplace is key both for the future of those affected and the UK.

A new report by the National Skills Forum, Closing the Gender Skills Gap, suggests that the UK is missing out on talent with women working below their skill level and often in low-paid, low-skilled occupations. It is estimated that

this costs the UK between £15 billion and £23 billion annually. The report explores ways to remove the barriers preventing women fully utilising and developing their skills, which will boost UK productivity, reduce the pay and opportunity gap between men and women and create a highly skilled workforce for the future. The

CASE STUDY

Happy Limited

Training company Happy has taken staff empowerment and work life balance to the extreme – and with extremely powerful results. Its approach is particularly right for women, who make up more than half the staff and the management team.

Managing director Cathy Busani has followed a typical career path at Happy, joining the business as a trainee trainer in the mid-1990s and progressing through a supportive network of mentors and peers to end up in her senior role.

Such progress is normal, and Happy is proud never to have hired a manager from outside the company, but has nurtured them all from within. This fact is even more impressive when you discover Happy's unique approach to promotion. People select the person they would like to be their manager, which means the system of management promotion is purely meritocratic and any risk of gender bias in management selection is left at the door.

Taking empowerment one level further, Happy staff are allowed to choose their own working schedule, and even their own business targets. In return, all salary information is open to everyone and pay is set according to results, allowing people to pick a balance of hours and targets so they earn at a level that feels comfortable to them. If they state they would like to earn more, their manager will help them set goals to allow them to achieve that.

Investors in People has always been impressed with Happy's high level of flexibility and empowerment, and Cathy has found the best practice enshrined in the Investors in People Standard highly valuable in motivating the company to keep improving. For women, the approach delivers invaluable benefits, though as Cathy is quick to point out, the Happy approach is not gender specific.



both within the workplace and outside, giving women not just opportunities but the aspiration to achieve more.

At Investors in People our perspective is clear. We are focused on how good practice can help organisations and their people improve performance and meet their goals. Organisations throughout the UK are using Investors in People to implement flexible working patterns that deliver real benefit to individuals as well as the business they work for. Working with the Investors in People framework is helping employers throughout the UK become much more systematic in their approach. All the evidence shows that this pays real dividends.

report calls for flexible working to be more widely seen as a productive tool for the whole organisation.

Taking a forward looking approach to people is part of a new kind of relationship to be negotiated between an individual's responsibilities at work and their wider roles. All the indicators point to more and more women wanting greater control over their working lives in the future. Ensuring there is a culture

of flexible working embedded across an organisation and recognising the talents of the whole workforce so that women of all ages and at all levels are able to make the most of their employment is key. Adopting a fully rounded approach to work-life balance has the added benefit of improving lives

Simon Jones is Chief Executive of Investors in People UK

The full report *Closing the Gender Skills Gap* can be downloaded at www.policyconnect.org.uk/skills/nsfapsg



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE