

From Thomas International Management Systems, Harris House, 17 West Street, Marlow, Bucks SL7 2LS. Tel: 01628 475366

Winning personality

Nicki Brannon, director of human resources for disco and snooker club owner European Leisure, explains how she establishes behavioural training requirements with the use of personality and job profiling



European Leisure gained a broad sense of its staff's training needs

European Leisure operates discos such as London's Hippodrome, venue bars and snooker clubs across the UK. Our history is rather chequered and there had traditionally been little in the way of training and development.

I was working as a field operator for snooker hall chain Riley Leisure Group for five years. It was taken over by Midsummer which in turn was bought by European Leisure. It was tough. We had high levels of debt and managers with a hire-and-fire mentality.

Current chief executive Ian Rock had been group managing director on the board of Midsummer Leisure. With no money for investment, the main thrust was to focus on getting people to perform at optimum levels. I was drafted in to help make this happen on the grounds that it would be better to put in someone with operational rather than personnel experience.

My background meant I knew the challenge involved in finding training that would be acceptable and motivational to a wide range of people who could be very cynical. By contrast, others had come to us from large organisations where they had already undergone considerable traditional management training.

The first step was to assess where people were and what training they needed. I decided to look for a training programme that would help assess the needs of people in the organisation. Everything I looked at seemed too pedestrian and I was beginning to panic until I came across Thomas International and its Personal Profile Analysis. I immediately liked it for its simplicity and for the short time it takes to complete.

The product is a series of 24 questions which focus on characteristics and behaviours. Each question contains four descriptions and the user has to choose both the one they least resemble and the one they most resemble. It is quite a subtle questionnaire – in some questions the options are very different but for others they are very similar. Feeding the responses into a

computer will generate a three- or four-page written report that describes your natural, preferred style of working, how others see you and a snapshot of how you perform under pressure.

A manual scoring system allows you to classify your behavioural patterns using the broad categories of dominance, influence, steadiness and compliance. There is no judgement involved – low and high scores mean different things but one is not necessarily

better than the other. For example, steadiness tells you about people's pace of working: high steadiness may mean someone is a good finisher; low steadiness may mean they can cope with lots of jobs at a time. Someone with a high compliance rating is a detailed perfectionist; a low compliance person is likely to be very independent who can easily break new ground.

To link these profiles to training needs you need to analyse jobs in the

same terms, and Thomas' Human Job Analysis can do this. It is based on a form requiring managers in charge of a job to supply answers to a number of questions. The results provide a profile of the job that – in combination with an individual's Personal Profile Analysis – helps identify training needs or suitability in recruitment.

In fact, this approach has gone even deeper into our culture. In conjunction with Thomas we put together a training seminar to help people understand the different profile types. This allows them to understand their own style and behaviour and how they appear to other people.

They have also learned how to identify the personality types of other people without actually getting them to fill in a form. This helps them understand when and how they need to modify their behaviour in order to communicate with and manage people of different types.

The HJA and PPA tools clearly have other applications. We have taken advantage of this and created further courses covering interview and selection skills using the profiling system. As part of our appraisal training we teach people how best to appraise people according to their profile.

We have also been getting people to do their own "job shape" so that they can determine their own training needs. This has helped us get a broad-brush sense of the training we need at European Leisure. Above all, perhaps, adopting the profiling system has helped bring the group together, not least by cross-fertilisation through courses which contain people from all four of our divisions. It is also a great communication tool, giving us a common language that we can use to describe behaviour and management style in an unambiguous way.

Verdict: something for everyone

PPA is highly workable, both for the untrained eye and for people who know the system well. For people who are not familiar with the meanings of the various "shapes", the written version provides a detailed description which can easily be used to give feedback to an employee or subordinate.

Because the descriptions are non-judgemental, high and low scores are neither good nor bad and jobs can be profiled in the same terms. It provides a non-threatening way of helping people identify their training needs.

Although we do not force people to use it, it is very popular. People often come to me with problems which we can help solve by looking at how their attitudes and performance are affected by their management style. It gives us the vocabulary and the hard evidence to do this.

What really appeals is that it can be used for training anyone at any level and at any time in their career – everyone will always get something out of it. I have had an excellent response from people who have been on the courses. Managers aged over 50 who have been in managerial positions for years have told me they have learned more on that one course than any other.

The overall result is that we have lots of evidence that managers are changing their style appropriately to improve their own performance and that of the people who work for them – and the business is benefiting as a result. We are still a tough organisation but that toughness now manifests itself in effective management and achieving the results we need.

Ratings

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