

Lubrizol Limited – languages in a European business environment

Lubrizol Limited has for the past two years been offering language training to its employees as part of a drive to develop a European identity at its site near Belper in Derbyshire. The company believes equipping staff with foreign language skills is key to creating this identity, and has introduced a written language policy, outlining its commitment to developing employees' foreign language capabilities.

The organisation employs 270 people at Belper and is part of The Lubrizol Corporation, a global provider of speciality chemicals, in particular lubricant additives for engine oils and other transportation-related fluids.

The company has a contract for the provision of language training and support with *The Language Business*, based in nearby Ashbourne. Approximately 25 employees are currently receiving language training in French, German and Italian, delivered on-site in weekly sessions.

Individuals take responsibility for their own progression with language learning

“Offering employees the opportunity to learn a new language is good for personal and career development,” says Debbie Maitland, Learning and Development Manager, who was initially responsible for setting up the classes. She was determined that staff should take ownership of language training, rather than see the initiative as an imposition from the human resources department. “Individuals take responsibility for their own progression with learning a new language, and form small study groups with colleagues from different departments. The experience has clearly been very positive, with increased communications and better relationships developing with our overseas colleagues and clients.”

Little goes a long way

Some managers can now conduct business meetings in another language, and other employees are already using their basic knowledge of French or German to develop better contact with clients and colleagues based on the continent. “Our account managers are finding that a little goes a long way,” remarks Debbie. “Being able to chat with clients and business partners, even just socially, in their own language is proving beneficial in establishing and maintaining

relationships – and much of our business depends on relationship building.”

Alison Brunsdon is HR Manager at the Belper site and works closely with her colleagues in Rouen. She has found that understanding the culture of her international colleagues is sometimes as important as speaking and understanding the language. “In the past, we sometimes felt that we weren’t fully engaged in projects with our French colleagues,” she remarks. As a result, Alison decided to undertake one-to-one tuition with Florence Guillot, one of the trainers from *The Language Business*.

This has provided some very positive outcomes, both for Alison and for the department as a whole. Most notably, Alison was recently invited to a day-long works council meeting in Rouen, where she took the floor to give a presentation to delegates, in French. “The outcome of the meeting was very positive, and it felt great to be able to communicate with those present in their own language. This has gained us major ground with our French colleagues.”

Cultural tips she has picked up from her native French teacher have also been invaluable, helping her to recognize and understand the subtle differences between French and English business structure and culture, and to adapt her approach accordingly in meetings.

Cementing client relationships

Andy Gelder is another success story from the initiative. A project manager with the company, his work takes him regularly to France for meetings with colleagues and clients. He has for the last twelve months undertaken group training in French with two colleagues from other departments. “I have really enjoyed the training and my improved competence in the language has been noticeable,” he remarks. “I feel much more confident now if we need to hold a meeting with a French-speaking client. They appreciate the efforts I am making and it has helped to develop and cement a number of important relationships.”

Other schemes undertaken by the company have been the creation of an internal website in both French and English, and the development of a partnership with a French college near Rouen: a number of students come to Belper each year for a twelve-month placement, giving a further international dimension to the business.

Debbie Maitland is delighted with the outcomes of the training. “In our case,” she reflects, “improved language skills are about more than just increasing our sales in export markets: the benefits are more subtle, but are nonetheless very important to our business overall.”

Contacts

Lubrizol

www.lubrizol.com

The Language Business

Tel: 01335 330808

www.language-business.co.uk

For more information about RLN East Midlands please contact us at:

RLN East Midlands, UK Trade and Investment, International Trade Centre, Innovation House, Riverside Park, Raynesway, Derby, DE21 7BF.

Tel: 01332 826432 | www.rln-eastmidlands.com