

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE CASE STUDY:

GRAPHIC PLC

INVESTING IN PEOPLE TO DELIVER QUALITY RECRUITMENT

Size: 170 staff

Sector: Electronics manufacturer

Locations: Crediton, Devon

Status: First recognised as an Investor in People in September 1994. Achieved Investors in People Profile in 2005. Recently successfully reviewed for both Investors in People and Profile.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Overall impact

"Investors in People has been a major part of the success and growth of our company. I honestly believe that. Graphic plc seeks to be at the forefront of good people management - and Investors in People Profile will ensure we continue that way."

Alan Good, Training and Development Manager

The organisation

Graphic plc produces high specification printed circuit boards in low to medium volumes for blue chip companies in the UK, Europe, Asia and the Americas. Founded as Graphic Electronics in 1968 by current executive chairman Rex Rozario OBE, with a staff of five, the firm was able to re-locate to its current site in Crediton in the following year. Now operating from a 60,000 square foot purpose built facility, Graphic plc produces more than 400 batches of product per month for its main market sectors of military, aerospace and telecommunications.

The challenge

By the early 1990s, after more than 20 years of steady growth, Graphic found itself struggling to keep pace in an increasingly challenging market place.

Training and Development Manager Alan Good says:

"Around this time, the printed circuit industry took a big leap forward in terms of its technology and complexity and I think we were caught on the hop. We also had a lot of our work with one particularly company who suddenly `switched off` from us – and at the time it was quite devastating.

"We therefore had to re-focus the business in order to move ourselves into a more competitive position."

Graphic began to realise that its faltering performance was down to a lack of training and communication skills. The future growth of the company needed to be managed more effectively.

"The company had moved to a size where things were becoming a bit fragmented," Alan Good says.

"You get a bit bigger and some of the more basic things started getting `lost` and we really needed to pull things together again. The skills that people needed - from management and team leadership to operating machinery – were very much lacking at that time."

The strategy

The recently introduced Investors in People programme offered a whole range of structures for taking the business forward. After committing to the standard in 1993, Graphic began working with Investors in People advisers to develop formal systems for staff training and development - and for evaluating the benefits.

Robust and comprehensive programmes for induction and appraisal helped staff to identify training needs. The company helped staff to gain a greater awareness of their role in the success of the company by introducing a system of Key Performance Indicators for team leaders. The company quickened the flow of information by devolving more responsibility through the departments.

As well as a particular focus on management training, Graphic introduced a system of NVQs to create a highly motivated, multi-skilled and flexible workforce, while encouraging individual staff to gain external qualifications and to develop long-term careers within the firm.

Investors in People recognition came within 12 months, with further successful reviews.

By 2004, Graphic was seeking to improve itself beyond the requirements of Investors in People.

"We were not satisfied at just achieving the standard," Alan Good says.

"We wanted something that would provide a stretch – to benchmark where we were and to give an in depth look at our strengths and weaknesses."

Graphic committed to Investors in People Profile – a framework for good practice that took the company into broader areas of people management and development.

The feedback from the four-day assessment was immediate and searching. Having identified the managerial function as an area for improvement, the company employed consultants with the aim of raising performance through more effective management of all of its 12 departments.

“Investors in People profile is a harder standard to achieve, but our assessor from Quality South West helped to make the whole process as a painless as possible,” says Alan Good.

“We received feedback on where and how we could improve, including training our team leaders and middle management to give them tools to be autonomous and run their departments in their own right.”

The results

From the mid-1990s, Graphic rapidly regained its competitive position in the market place and is now among the top five companies in its sector in Europe, with realistic aims to become the best. Numerous awards include successive national Deloitte and Touche awards for the fastest growing technology company and a South West Business Challenge award for “dedication to staff improvement”.

Graphic continues to sustain its successful business performance achieving 5% growth, and increasing its operating profit by 64% in the last financial year. The company also maintains its continuous self-funded investment programme of £1.2 Million per year, to enhance, upgrade and replace its state of the art plant and equipment.

Underpinning this growth has been a quickening of turnaround times and a happier and more motivated workforce, with significant reductions in staff turnover.

“We now have people walking through our door and asking if there are jobs available,” Alan Good says.

“And they all say it’s because they’ve heard we’re a good place to work.”