

Investors in People Case Study:

The Premiere Kitchen Company



Background

Size:	139 staff
Sector:	Manufacturing
Location:	Gloucester
Status:	Recognised as an Investor in People, July 2006

Overall impact

“As well as giving us happy and motivated employees, Investors in People has also given us an edge in the market place. When you`re sitting there talking to a potential customer, it really does add a fair bit of weight to your argument. It`s not just about price. It`s about how we treat our people and our commitment to customer service. It means that when we say we`ll deliver on a certain date, we actually mean it.”

Gary Holt, The Premiere Kitchen Company

The organisation

Current Managing Director Paul Markey founded the company in a small workshop in Gloucester in April 1989, with the aim of manufacturing, supplying and fitting high quality bespoke kitchens to retail and trade customers.

A year later, the business achieved lift-off when Gloucester City Council commissioned the company to produce kitchens for planned maintenance schemes – and the firm has been supplying the public sector ever since.

In 1995, the growing company moved to a purpose-built factory in St Albans Road, Gloucester and changed its name to The Premiere Kitchen Company. In 1998, the company split its manufacturing operation in two, with the acquisition of a second, larger factory on Gloucester`s Madleaze Trading Estate. In 2002, however, Madleaze was doubled in size to accommodate the company`s entire operation – and a new £1 million fully automated production line.

In 2005, the firm re-located to a new 100,000 square foot, purpose-built production base at Hardwicke on the edge of the city.

That first commission from Gloucester City Council in 1989 was a pivotal moment in the company`s history. The Premiere Kitchen Company now manufactures and supplies kitchens exclusively for more than 150 local authorities and housing associations.

The challenge

One of the biggest issues facing the Premiere Kitchen Company when it committed to Investors in People in 2004 was its own rapid growth – and how to manage this more effectively.

“Firstly, the level of communication through the company was not clear and wasn’t accurate in every single way – which meant that the company’s message didn’t always get down to production level,” Gary Holt says.

“There was a perceived to be a ‘them and us’ scenario between the workshop and the office staff. So we needed to build bridges.

“With training, the issue was twofold. Firstly, the employees didn’t really recognise that they were being trained. Secondly, we didn’t have a structure in place to enable targeted and focused training. Our staff development needed to be closely linked to aims of the business – and its future success.”

The strategy

The Premiere Kitchen Company laid the foundations for future growth through vigorous processes of induction, ‘job chats’ and appraisals. The company actively encourages its staff to develop their roles and skills in order to progress into more senior positions.

“We ask people where they want to be in two, five and ten years hence,” says Gary Holt.

“And we tell them that if their aims aspirations fit in with our business plan, we’ll develop there roles accordingly. Our MD has even offered his job to anyone that wants it in the future.

“People now actually believe that they can pursue a career with us, rather than clocking-in, clocking-out and waiting to be paid.”

The firm has also worked hard to build a culture of teamwork and mentoring, with employees supporting each other and sharing knowledge.

“We remain a family business with family ethics, using the ‘arm-round’ approach from top to bottom, despite an increasing and despite being in a 100,000 square foot factory.”

The firm also embarked on root and branch improvements to its communications.

“Recently, I met the production employees, “ says Gary Holt.

“There were 40 or 50 in the one room. A couple of people were reading papers. Another was eating sandwich and there were a few more at the back chatting. It was very difficult to get them to communicate, to join in.

"We learned lessons from this experience. I suggested breaking the guys up into teams of six or seven, so we could actually get the message across. They've taken that on board and now communication runs both ways."

Communication has been further improved with the introduction of an Investors in People Focus Group that is made up of representatives from all over the company. The firm also issues `employee satisfaction` questionnaires and encourages all staff to contribute to a quarterly newsletter.

The investment in training is constant and ongoing, with people in all departments encouraged to pursue external qualifications.

A £2.5million investment in new machinery has been matched by development programmes for engineers and operators.

"Our machines come from as far as Italy, Spain and Germany," Gary Holt says.

"So we will get our engineers to visit the factories, as part of their induction.

The results

The Premiere Kitchen Company expects to reach a turnover of £20 million in the next two years.

Staff are happier and more motivated and are less likely to wish to leave, with the firm recording signification reductions both in turnover of staff and in day-to-day absenteeism.

"Through the good practices of Investors in People, our employees can see real benefits of staying with us. When we recruit, we find it`s a major selling point to candidates," Gary Holt says.

"Our staff are our future, so we have to train and invest in them."

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