EMBEDDING APPRENTICESHIPS INTO TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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Talent management has evolved into a common and essential management practice covering a multitude of areas including organisational capability, individual development, performance enhancement, workforce planning and succession planning. Training and development underpins each of these strands. From onboarding and immersive training to apprentice, graduate, and leadership and management training programmes. All should work together to support a business’ talent management strategy and its key objectives.

With UK unemployment rates at 4.8% (the lowest since July 2005) global political uncertainty and the ambiguity surrounding Brexit, it has never been so challenging to find external talent to meet existing workforce requirements.

Tessa James, HR Director at Lifetime Training, recognises that talent management is an integral component to the business strategy as people are the key enabler for sustainable business success. “At Lifetime Training it is a companywide, holistic strategy which shapes how we hire, develop and retain our high performing, life-changing people.”

“It’s simply not enough to merely focus on attracting talent into the business but rather that companies must develop, manage and retain these individuals and make sure their culture reflects their ethos. It is also important to put systems in place to measure the return on investment of nurturing this talent,” she explains.

One of the most popular stages for businesses to identify and employ talent is when students are about to graduate, but the same could be said for those approaching the end of their studies. For larger companies, the reforms to the apprenticeship programme will have a real impact on the way that businesses develop their people, especially those in their talent bank. For smaller businesses, one important aspect of the reforms is the change from the old apprenticeship frameworks to new apprenticeship standards, will open the door for employers to train their team members to a higher level, through higher and more flexible apprenticeship standards.

Tessa concludes: “It’s vital that organisations not only respond to current talent challenges but actively anticipate future challenges and opportunities. Developing talent pipelines for the future is quite simply business critical.”

One way to increase the value of apprenticeships is to adopt apprenticeships as part of a wider talent management strategy, whereby companies start to nurture talent from within instead of associating it purely with recruitment. Research indicates that 80% of companies that invest in apprentices report an increase in staff retention, but that’s just the beginning. There is also compelling evidence that progressing your brightest and best talent can significantly boost your bottom line.

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WHAT TO THINK ABOUT WHEN INVESTING IN APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Alignment to corporate strategy

There’s no point in building an apprenticeship programme that doesn’t deliver for the business. If your apprenticeship programme is run in isolation you will lose the benefits and outputs already discussed. For example, multi-site businesses may have specific KPIs, specific departments may have particular objectives. Build these into the apprenticeship programme and ensure apprentices are aware of the ultimate aims and business strategy and understand how they can contribute. If just one apprentice in one site starts to deliver an uplift in sales, and is rewarded for it, it will only be a matter of time before others follow suit, apprentices and other colleagues alike.

Choosing the right standards

The new apprenticeship standards offer new opportunities to employers. Some sectors will be working with apprenticeship frameworks for the foreseeable future until their sector standards have been agreed and assessment plans put in place. Others, like retail, will be up and running from May 2017. Working with a knowledgeable training provider, like Lifetime, can help employers to build an apprenticeship programme to budget that delivers for the business and the apprentice. Lifetime commits to working with its employer partners to agree what standards would best suit their skills needs, to map out career pathways, to integrate with existing training and development, to manage the DAS funding account, to train and assess to the highest quality, and to conduct regular programme reviews for any additional support and training delivery that may be required.

References

- Office for National Statistics, UK labour market: January 2017 (online)
- The National Apprenticeship Service

WHY APPRENTICESHIPS COULD WORK FOR YOU

- Employers can take advantage of government funding that is available for apprenticeship training. Employers with a £3m plus pay bill will be paying an apprenticeship levy from 6th April 2017. If they don’t use it for apprenticeship training, that money is lost so it makes business sense. Employers with pay bills of less than £3m receive 90% government funding of the total training cost of apprenticeship training.
- Apprenticeships are flexible, they are work-based training programmes so there is limited time ‘off the shop floor’. The assessment programme of activity and assessment can be created by training providers like Lifetime to work around existing training and resource infrastructures.
- Apprenticeships have more credibility, going forwards the apprenticeship reforms have introduced a higher quality programme of units as part of the move to apprenticeship standards. Sector employers have agreed on the learning requirements and assessment procedures to ensure apprentices complete their courses with a full set of highly relevant and sought after skills, and are employment and role ready.
- Apprenticeships lead to a committed workforce, increasing employee engagement and productivity levels. Research indicates that hiring apprentices demonstrates the business willingness to invest and develop its employees. This in turn fosters engagement, which has been proven to have a positive correlation on productivity levels and attrition rates.

INVOLVING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Think carefully about the groups of people you need to engage with across the business to support the apprenticeships strategy. Not only will you need senior management buy-in, you will also require support from the ground up. Apprenticeship programmes often fall down when apprentices aren’t given the appropriate level of support from within their organisation to complete their course. Apprentices, especially newly recruited ones, require a network of support. They need a buddy or colleague to go to for help on a daily basis, they need access to a line-manager, they need HR support as well as the people who deliver their training and assessment and any additional support they require.

“Talent management has become a priority for CEOs” - CIPD Survey, 2015

“Only three in 10 businesses manage to align learning with business goals” - Towards Maturity Report, 2014