

Gaining through training as profits double

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Business is shaping up nicely for moulding specialists E&F Composites following a highly successful training programme.

The manufacturer of products for off highway and leisure vehicles anticipates a doubling of profits this year as productivity has leaped by almost 30% and wastage has been slashed - saving almost £50,000.

Expansion is now on the agenda with talk of developing a third Hartlepool site to allow the manufacture of new products.

These dramatic improvements in business performance are being attributed directly to the introduction of a business excellence plan, leading to staff gaining NVQ Level 2 business improvement qualifications – a result of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded Train to Gain service.

Engineering manager with the Hartlepool based firm, Stephen Passmore, said: “We began by examining our production process and identifying ways in which we could improve things. Some were really simple, such as creating a tidier environment in which people no longer wasted time looking for tools and equipment.

“Then we approached Business Link to see if we could get some funding for training. The response was positive and we teamed up with Hartlepool College of Further Education to run the programme. The results were almost immediate as the guys on the shop floor developed a much clearer understanding of the manufacturing process and enthusiastically set about working as a team to improve it.”

And this smoother, more efficient set up quickly brought other new rewards as E & F was approached by a customer facing a supply problem following a fire at another composite manufacturer’s factory. Within five days new moulds had been made and the components were in production – a feat Stephen Passmore believes would not have been possible but for the changes on the shop floor.

So impressed was the client that a delegation was sent from its European purchasing department in Brussels to explore further business opportunities. And the confidence sweeping through the production team meant quality controller Dan Scott was drafted in to make a project presentation to the visitors.

He said: “We all feel we have taken some massive steps forward over the past few months. There is a real buzz about the place and everyone is keen to play their part in continuing the success we’ve tasted.”

Train to Gain aims to help organisations get the training they need to stay ahead in a competitive environment by improving the skills of the workforce and has been developed as part of a wider effort by the Regional Skills Partnership in the North East to increase the productivity and further regenerate the region.

A skills brokerage service jointly funded by LSC North East and the Regional Development Agency, One NorthEast, will offer impartial advice and match

training needs to local providers of learning, to ensure that flexible, responsive training programmes are delivered to meet employers' needs. A core element of Train to Gain is the access to appropriate funding of Skills for Life, first Level 2 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Level 3 NVQ's and Management and Leadership learning opportunities.

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, added:

“The value of training is often overlooked but E & F Composites has demonstrated clearly just what a massive difference it can make to the performance of individuals and the company.

“Train to Gain offers organisations opportunity to make a huge impact on business – by ensuring staff receive training that meets their learning needs whilst positively impacting on the organisations bottom line.”

ENDS

Editor's Note:

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world-class standards. Our vision is that by 2010, young people and adults in England have the knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. Established in 2001, we work nationally, regionally and locally from a network of offices across the country.

In the North East the LSC and One NorthEast are working closely with other agencies to ensure that the design and delivery of Train to Gain is fully integrated with other types of support on offer to business. This includes ensuring the skills brokerage services is integrated with the Business link branded support service and that support available is fully aligned with the support to employers from other agencies in the region, such as Jobcentre Plus – who can assist with recruitment of staff.

Train to Gain service provides:

- A comprehensive analysis of an organisation's training needs, which also identifies the elements that may be applicable for funding, as well as those for which the employer must pay.
- Easy access to relevant, flexible, high quality training, delivered mostly in the workplace using an "assess-train-assess" model, which takes the employee's prior learning and experience into account.
- Information and support to access a wide range of training packages including higher level qualifications (including Level 3) and training which may not lead to a qualification.
- Information and advice to employees on qualifications and training, eligibility for LSC funded learning opportunities, financial support, skills shortages and priorities.
- Support to develop strategies to address future training needs, which are aligned to wider business objectives.
- A contribution to wage costs to help employers when staff are absent from work due to training (available only to companies with under 50 employees).

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