

Improving productivity and staff engagement through better literacy



CASE STUDY

Northern Districts Security achieved:

- Reduced staff attrition
- Return on investment of 2.4 on the training investment in the first year
- Increase of 5.6% in staff productivity in the second year.



Working together to get started

When people have the literacy and numeracy skills they need to do their job, the results speak for themselves. They are more skilled to do their job, they contribute more to how the work is done, such as making suggestions on how things could be improved, they feel more engaged in their work and are less likely to leave. It adds up to a better workplace culture, less downtime and ultimately, a more productive and profitable workplace.

One approach is to work directly with trainers and assessors in firms to give them the skills and support they need to include literacy learning strategies and techniques into the training they deliver.

One such example is the work of ETITO with Northern Districts Security, a Whangarei-based firm. Northern Districts operations manager Jean-Pierre [JP] Dignon has had no formal adult training experience but a strong commitment to his staff and the benefits of training. JP took up ETITO's offer of supporting his professional development as a trainer and worked with the ETITO vocational literacy team to implement a number of strategies into his training. The work began as part of a special ETITO Embedded Literacy Project in 2009 but has continued since.

In a highly competitive industry, the level of investment in training is an important factor to any security

company. It is important to be able to measure the benefits of training and also look at practical and specific examples of where improved literacy skills are having a direct impact on the business and people within it.

ETITO engaged an independent researcher to look at the Northern Districts Security work and measure the return on investment. Here is what they found.

Literacy challenges

A key component of the role of the security guard is dealing with customers. It's important that its customers have a positive experience and confidence and satisfaction in Northern Districts Security and its staff. This means security guards being able to interact with customers in a confident and fluent manner.

Before embarking on the embedded literacy programme, it was evident that the company's security guards lacked the confidence and ability to openly interact with its customers.

Today, there is observed evidence and customer feedback that Northern Districts Security staff communicate and interact with greater confidence, ability and willingness. This can be directly attributable to the embedded literacy training.



Improving communication

ETITO worked with the firm to conduct a needs analysis to identify where there were opportunities to improve both the verbal and written communication and fluency of security guards.

Over time, as the principles of the literacy programme became embedded and ingrained in the company's operations and staff became more engaged in the learning, it was evident that the guards had more confidence in their verbal and written communication. This was found to be the case when they were dealing with customers as well as in their communications with managers and among themselves. Northern Districts Security received positive feedback from its clients that reflected the changes. As a result, the firm has been able to increase its customer loyalty and retention and grow its market share within the region.

Improved written communication has meant better reporting and documentation. Among the tasks that have improved are the recording by security guards of each alarm activation or fail-to-set callout they make. This has resulted in ensuring that all guard activity is captured and a 33% increase in revenue since the literacy programme began.



Gaining staff loyalty

Retaining staff in the region and in the industry is a challenge. One of the key motives for the training was to provide staff with secondary benefits that would enhance the organisational culture and minimise staff attrition. It was important too that staff were retained once they had been through the training and attained higher qualifications, to make the most of the firm's training investment.

In the 12 months before the embedded literacy programme, Northern Districts Security lost 23 staff to retirement, to other security companies [within and outside the region] and to other industries and vocations. In the second year of the programme, the business grew by five employees, with just three staff leaving over the 12 month period [one to retirement due to illness].

Improving labour productivity

Having staff more engaged in their work delivered an increase in labour productivity [revenue compared to labour costs] of 5.6% in the two years the embedded literacy programme has been running at Northern Districts Security. This has had a direct impact on business profitability and sustainability, as well as asset value.



Improving security guard skills

Security guards have shown great commitment to increasing their qualification achievement as a result of better literacy. In the first year of the embedded literacy programme, the firm's guards attained 357 New Zealand Qualification Authority credits collectively. They continue to achieve higher levels of credits.

Return on training investment

Through an overall increase in literacy skills amongst the security guards, the staff began to develop the confidence and capability to record the respective activities they were performing more accurately and comprehensively. As a result, the business was able to recover revenue that in the past they had not been able to due to a lack of records. Jean-Pierre acknowledges that, even though they used other means to ensure that the security guards maintained their log books more accurately, he does attest to the fact that the training programme provided, by far, the greatest contributor to the gain in revenue.

In the first year of the programme, the business realised a return on investment of 2.4 from the direct contribution of revenue recovery. This achievement Jean-Pierre attributes to the tremendous effort made by the staff and the embedded literacy programme.

“Guards feel more valued and we have had great positive feedback from clients who have noticed an improvement in communication skills and attitude.”

“A few years ago we decided that we wanted to make a positive change to the way our company was operating within the security industry. Although it is not compulsory to train security guards, we decided that we would start training our guards so that they could achieve their National Certificates in Security. We worked alongside an industry training organisation (ETITO) to create an in-house training programme. We also worked with Lee Agnew and her team from the ETITO to improve workplace literacy. Our operations manager, JP Dignon, completed a vocational literacy course and started implementing some of the skills he learnt into his training sessions, resulting in a much higher level of literacy in our

workplace, which has had a great impact on staff writing capabilities.

We have not looked back since. The benefits to our company and clients have been exceptional. Guards feel more valued and we have had great positive feedback from clients who have noticed an improvement in communication skills and attitude. Our clients can now be confident that when they use our services they deal with trained industry professionals.

During this time, JP was awarded the New Zealand Association for Training and Development’s Overall Winner On-The-Job-Coach Award.”

George Cherrington
General Manager
Northern Districts Security



Jean-Pierre Dignon, Operations Manager



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