

FOCUS ON EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Now more than ever before, the pressure to successfully engage with employers is on. Every contract is heavily weighted towards job outcomes; providers won't get paid if they don't get results, recession or no recession.

Yet paradoxically many providers are still not investing in the resources needed for employer engagement, culminating in horrifically poor results demonstrated by the Pathways contract (11% of starters into employment).

Will FND providers be any better at delivering employer engagement results and achieving sustainable jobs?

The allocation of resources rests with individual providers and to date many of them have not directed enough towards employer engagement. This I believe is the main reason for poor results and I pray that FND providers see that they need a radical approach to turn things around.

RECRUITMENT

The starting point is recruiting the right staff.

The skills required for employer engagement are specialist and very sales orientated. This is not a role that can be tacked onto an existing role; it requires a very definite range of abilities. All too frequently people end up in the role even though it wasn't what they were recruited for!



To do this work well you have to have a passion for it, business acumen and a respect for the pressures employers face. This job isn't suited to everyone!

PAY

To attract the right calibre of staff the salary needs to be a healthy base rate with a suitable reward structure, possibly in line with local recruitment agency rates. Rewards could include time off, internal awards and the chance to lead in different areas of work.

In return providers should expect fifteen to twenty effective phone calls a day, or three meetings. Staff should be out of the office 70% of the time finding vacancies and meeting employers. They must retain a presence in the office to share employer intelligence with staff who are working with customers to help ensure they remain focused on their core purpose.

Staff need to be flexible to meet employers' needs. They will have to attend employer events, meetings, visit employers out of hours when convenient etc.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Employer engagement staff must have the tools to do their job if they are to operate efficiently in the business world and compete with the private sector.

A mobile phone (for direct contact), business cards (to project a professional image) and a dedicated email address are a minimum.

It is also essential that they maintain a database to track their employer relationships - not having one is a sin and one that's not being kept up to date is disciplinary!

Good marketing materials are needed to promote the service, with a focus on "we can help you" rather than "we need you".

All materials should clearly state the business case, be concise, have a local focus and contain facts and figures around economic and labour market intelligence. Nothing has more impact on business than the bottom line; so to grab the recipient's attention you need to be clear about how much your service is saving them and the economy.

(continued)

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Time spent researching the local employer base is important to assess the state of the local labour market.

I would advocate a sector specific approach to the staff structure to help providers develop a healthy working knowledge of the mechanics of particular industries.

The public sector is a good place to start, given that it is one of the largest employers. Although they are trying to down size, they still offer a more stable and supportive environment than Britain's largely SME dominated economy. There is also a duty of care that doesn't exist in the private sector.

Other sectors such as security, care, tourism and call centres are flourishing. They are also sectors with that wonderful nuance that makes them ripe for this kind of service: high turnover/churn rates and shocking customer service levels. This costs them money they could be spending on training, and profits in terms of tackling lousy customer care.

The important thing to remember is that employer engagement is a professional service which will assist British employers to fill their skills gaps and encourage wealth in the local economy.

There is a strong business case for engaging employers and providers need to gear up with the right staff to get that message across.

CONCLUSION

I am writing this article because I'm concerned about the current state of welfare to work, and feel with my 13 years of experience in employer engagement I have valuable points to contribute to the agenda.

If providers don't change the way they deliver this element of the programmes they will not achieve the necessary results and, for the longer term benefit of individual and the country as a whole, we can't afford for that to happen.

Claire Mitchell,
Engage Employment Solutions Ltd

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT WORKING IN FIFE

Two trainees have successfully completed qualifications at the Skills Development Centre in Kirkcaldy which will allow them to move safely into the construction industry.

Jamie Grieve and Keith McAdam are currently on a Get Ready for Work, Film+ programme with **Fife Council Development Services**. Through this Intermediate Labour Market programme they have gained valuable construction skills and certificates backed by PASMA, the Construction Skills Certification Scheme.

Development Services arranged a placement with G & J Seddon at their site in Lochore where the company is currently building a care home. The trainees worked with a variety of trades people gaining valuable experience despite the difficult economic downturn. Jamie says, "Gaining my certificates with Fife Council and my placement G & J Seddon has been a valuable experience for me. I have gained a lot of knowledge and have a greater understanding on how a construction site operates."

"We were delighted to help out by giving the local lads the chance to work on our site and give them experience and hands on skills with our various sub contractors," said Stuart Torrance, site manager of G & J Seddon. "Both Jamie and Keith have gained knowledge in seeing how a building is put together and how the trades are co-ordinated."

This example of employer engagement in action has enabled Keith to secure a college place while Jamie is currently looking confidently for full time employment.

