

Clinton Cards Group sets a fresh benchmark for work-based learning in Retail sector



Clinton Cards Group launches nationally accredited staff training programme for National Apprenticeship Week: 1 - 5 February 2010

Recognising the importance of investing in people, the Clinton Cards Group is launching its EDI-accredited Retail Diploma, NVQ and Apprenticeship programme during National Apprenticeship Week 2010, providing ongoing career development opportunities to thousands of staff in 800 stores.

Forming part of the company's wider strategy to provide optimal customer service and attract and retain valued employees, Clinton Cards Group has enlisted the expertise of accredited awarding body EDI to map the company's bespoke in-house training programme with national Retail qualifications. Clinton Cards Group will also work closely with successful training provider

Protocol Skills (www.protocol-skills.co.uk) to deliver the qualifications, helping employees to learn whilst on the job.

Over the past three years the retailer has focused on both building and recognising staff skill sets across the business. This strengthened commitment to work-based learning has resulted in employee turnover figures improving by 14% since 2007. 85% of Managers have over three years service, helping to create consistent, high-quality customer service in all stores

Annette Middlebrook, Group HR Director at Clinton Cards Group, said: "At whatever age or route people take to join our company, there are comprehensive and appealing career prospects available whether they are established professionals or school-leavers. People are surprised by this, as many typically start out in retail with a Saturday job or part-time work for a bit of extra income. The challenge for us is educating and motivating them to consider retail as not just a job but a long-term career."

“ This qualification will not only benefit staff while at Clinton Cards Group but is something that will be recognised throughout their career. ”

Nineteen year-old sales assistant Lauren Keeling joined her local Birthdays store in Rotherham in March 2009. In just ten months she has learnt new skills in customer service, till operation and stock taking and even helped to open and train new staff at a local Birthdays Pure Party Store. Lauren comments: "I started out in retail after finishing school three years ago just to earn myself a bit of money - I didn't realise what a fun and challenging environment it is to work in. I really get a buzz out of talking to customers and helping them, so if you are a people person then retail is a great career to get into. There are so many opportunities to learn new skills at Birthdays which is great as I can become even better at my job and earn more money. Helping to open a brand new store was a great experience and has encouraged me to further my training with the new Customer Care NVQ later this year."

For both Clinton Cards Group and other major retail employers, the benefits of nationally accredited qualifications extend beyond simply

improving skills within individual stores. Helping to professionalise the retail industry, the qualifications are fundamental in attracting new recruits and promoting significant career opportunities within retail. Annette Middlebrook explains this move as a key development: "During the current economic climate, a big challenge facing all retailers is the recruitment and retention of high-calibre employees. In a recession, retailers are typically inundated with candidates applying for jobs; however, many of those may only be looking for a short-term solution to pay the bills. In order to attract and keep valued employees keen to carve their career in retail, it is vital that companies invest in training and development.

"We have run a very successful in-house training programme, which has given all our staff equal opportunity to progress and develop. However, with our new mapped training programmes, staff will not only develop themselves as individuals but will gain qualifications and skills for

life, giving them a greater sense of confidence in their own ability and a real pride in their achievements. Through the process of mapping our training to the national qualifications, we have also gained a real perspective on the standards that we should be expecting in terms of operations, customer service and working in retail."

Nicola Buffham, Corporate Partnership Manager at Protocol Skills, commented: "This tailor-made training package will go a long way towards ensuring that all staff at Clinton Cards Group are fully trained and confident in the role they are delivering. The commitment from Clinton Cards Group in offering these qualifications to its staff shows how seriously it takes customer service and its employees' personal development. This qualification will not only benefit staff while at Clinton Cards Group but is something that will be recognised throughout their career."

Gareth Phillips, Director of Sales

and Business Strategy at EDI, believes that companies need to ensure that their training and qualifications are relevant for their business needs. He commented: "One of our roles as an awarding body is to work with employers to achieve formal recognition and accreditation for their own training programmes, as well as helping them develop programmes which can be mapped to the nationally recognised qualifications. As a result, not only can employers fulfil their commitment to the skills pledge of up-skilling their staff, but also increase productivity and business performance.

"As our work with Clinton Cards Group has shown, knowing that an in-house training programme has been quality assured and accredited brings benefits to all parties - from employees looking to develop their career prospects to employers delivering improved business performance. ■