

Commercial in Confidence



Investors in People
Post Recognition Review

1st choice RECRUITMENT

on behalf of



Assessor:
On-site date:

Jeannette Stanley
16 December 2009

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1 INTRODUCTION

1st Choice Recruitment is an independent, recruitment agency that was originally established in 1989 when it opened its first branch and head offices in Bedford. Its mission is to *provide a service that is value for money whilst maintaining excellent service levels.*

Since it started 1st Choice has experienced steady growth and now has branches in Biggleswade, Hitchin, Huntingdon and Milton Keynes with an excellent reputation for providing a highly professional and personalised service to both clients and candidates alike. Its success is built upon a solid team ethos and a set of core values that govern the way that it operates.

1st Choice continues to operate under the inspirational leadership of the Chief Executive who is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the business, as well as the day-to-day operational and financial management of the branches. There are currently 25 people employed within the organisation of which 12 were included in the Investors in People (IIP) discussions conducted at all five branches.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report confirms the verbal feedback given to 1st Choice on 16 December 2009, following the on-site interviews and a review of relevant paperwork submitted for this review. The report also confirms that sufficient, reliable and current evidence was gathered to conclude that organisation continues to meet all criteria of the core IIP Standard. Such was the consistency of positive evidence gathered during the review that no areas for development were identified. In my opinion, 1st Choice is a shining example of what an Investor in People should be!

The summary below represents the IIP findings within the context of identified strengths.

Key strengths

- Excellent leadership and role modelling demonstrated by the Chief Executive who consistently inspires and motivates
- A genuine commitment to develop and maintain high levels of morale during the current economic downturn
- A set of core values govern the way that the organisation operates
- Excellent use of key result areas throughout the branch network
- A supportive and accessible management team
- An extremely committed and loyal staff that is determined to succeed
- A strong culture of recognition and reward
- A long-standing and genuine commitment to staff development
- Superb use of internal expertise to coach, mentor as well as deliver bespoke training

- Excellent communication ensures a good understanding of organisational priorities
- An emphasis on sharing knowledge and expertise within and across the branches

3 CHANGES AND PROGRESS SINCE THE LAST REVIEW

1st Choice was last reviewed in December 2006; all areas for potential improvement identified at the previous assessment have been considered and implemented where appropriate. Since the last assessment a number of changes have taken place with a marginal impact on IIP including a global, economic downturn and a number of staff changes including a reduction in the workforce.

4 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

It was jointly agreed that the review objectives would be to:

- Compare 1st Choice with all evidence requirements of the IIP Standard
- Identify and provide feedback and encouragement of good practice, as well as any opportunities for continuous improvement that would be helpful to the company and its people
- There were no additional client objectives

It was agreed that I would gather evidence through:

- Discussions with a representative of staff from across all five branches
- 1:1 interviews
- Telephone interviews
- Examination of relevant paper work

As part of the assessment I reviewed a range of documents that included:

- The Business Plan Focus Points 2009-2010
- Vision and values
- Examples of blank appraisal paperwork for Branch Managers and also for Sales Staff
- Directory of Training
- An example of a Personal Development / Induction Folder

5 GENERAL FINDINGS RELATING TO THE IIP PRINCIPLES

Principle 1 Developing strategies to improve the performance of the organisation

- There is strong leadership and great clarity of direction provided by the Chief Executive, supported by a strategy for continuous improvement in which extremely clear, measurable objectives in the form of key result areas are established and set out in the business plan developed each year.
- The company's plan for 2009-2010 has been developed in line with the mission and values and clearly sets out the organisation's focus for the operational year ahead such as business development, people development, operational, marketing, candidate attraction and care, client care, finance and cash-flow.
- The plan's main objectives are effectively shared with all staff along with the organisation's core values that truly govern the way that 1st Choice operates. *As we're a very close working team the values are extremely important to us, especially when dealing with the pressures of clients in an economic downturn.*
- The corporate plan is underpinned by the development of individual, branch plans that are translated via key result areas into measurable objectives for each desk, both temporary and permanent, and for each individual.
- Corporate and branch priorities are tracked and monitored on a daily, weekly, monthly basis and are collectively reviewed and discussed in the series of monthly 1:1s as well as in the in staff meetings and annual appraisals managers hold throughout the branch network.
- Progress on targets and achievements are also reviewed during managers' meetings that also continue to take place on a monthly basis. The "5 at 9" morning briefings provide a clear focus for the day ahead.
- Monthly 1:1s are consistently held and ensure that everyone's individual needs and concerns are reviewed in a confidential manner, as well as any learning and development needs that are immediately addressed.
- In addition to the monthly 1:1s, quarterly meetings are held that are tailored specifically for those who manage the temporary/permanent desks, as well as for administration and back office support staff. These occasions provide excellent opportunities to share best practice, discuss ideas and suggestions. The meetings are also believed to be highly motivational as managers use them for praising effort and celebrating success.

- Interviewees demonstrated that they fully understand what is expected of them by being able to describe clearly and precisely how their role directly contributes to the success of 1st Choice through their key result areas. Other key mechanisms for achieving this level of understanding are induction and job specifications, day-to-day interaction between managers and their staff, monthly 1:1s and appraisals, team meetings and the staff handbook which clearly sets out 1st Choice standards and expectations.
- Despite the impact of the credit crunch over the past year 1st Choice's commitment to staff development has not wavered. The Chief Executive indicated that the development of people is seen as a fundamental, ongoing activity which underpins the success of the business. *We have a very flexible budget and we never refuse training or development if it's needed.*
- In line with the business planning process, branch managers continue to identify the strategic priorities for learning and development by assessing the learning implications of the business objectives which are fed through to the Training Manager who develops and delivers a rolling programme of bespoke training events throughout the year.
- A key focus for this year has been to ensure that administration staff are developed to achieve the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) qualification; this also applies to all new staff. *We have a wonderful training manager who makes sure that we have everything we need – we're always looking for ways to improve and the internal training is excellent for doing this. We get to meet colleagues from other branches who help us generate new ideas - it's great for team building!*
- A culture of openness and trust is clearly evident within 1st Choice in which interviewees confirmed a strong sense of mutual respect exists. *Our managers have all previously been consultants – they demonstrate high levels of integrity at all times and never ask us to do anything that they're not prepared to do themselves, from a drive-around to handling objections or dealing with demanding clients.*

Principle 2 Taking action to improve the performance of the organisation

- The Chief Executive has successfully created a culture where people enjoy coming to work, working with their colleagues and learning and developing for the benefit of 1st Choice and themselves. Her personal, leading by example, management style is now emulated throughout the branch offices. *We have a really effective management team at the moment.* Discussions with staff revealed that coaching, mentoring and shadowing and 1:1 reviews are all part of the learning culture.
- Throughout the discussions branch managers referred to developing their teams as being a top priority. *We certainly focus on supporting our people as much as we can – without their knowledge and skills we wouldn't have been able to negotiate tenders or win new contracts – it's been a very tough year and extremely competitive, yet we have been successful!*
- A strong team ethos is clearly evident within 1st Choice demonstrated in the large amount of peer support and encouragement provided to ensure that performance levels are kept high. Inter-branch support and understanding have had a positive impact on morale.
- As a small organisation, managers easily recognise that each individual's contribution is critical to 1st Choice's success. Increasing market share and generating new business within the context of a financial downturn has certainly been challenging, however, an emphasis is placed on motivating people through a cycle of social events and other activities.
- There is also an emphasis placed on recognising and valuing the contribution staff make through the use emails of thanks and praise personally sent by the Chief Executive either individually or through a group email; achievement shield presentations occur throughout the year at the staff conference, vouchers are also given for time-off, sometimes a bottle of wine, flowers, cards and chocolates are also given.
- A key theme that cropped up during many of the discussions related to the personalised and professional quality of service provided to clients and candidates. Related to this 1st Choice has fostered a culture of involvement and empowerment in order to capitalise on the talents of its people. *I like to encourage people to take the lead on a particular project depending on their knowledge, interest and skills. This encourages a sense of ownership at all levels. Our individual reviews play a crucial role in establishing longer term plans.*

- The commitment to staff development is outstanding and ongoing. As previously mentioned, there is a rolling programme of events developed and delivered throughout the year to meet the needs of the business and employees alike, ensuring that customer service, financial and cultural standards are maintained, as well as legal and corporate governance. *Learning and development is really an everyday activity – I often pick up techniques and best practice from my colleagues just by listening.*
- Examples of effective learning and development delivered this year include 21 Steps Induction; Workers' Registration Scheme; Franklins Diary; REC qualifications; Agency Workers' Directive; Negotiating Skills; Closing Conversations; Handling Objections; Advanced Interview Technique; Speculative Calling and Team Building – to name but a few.

Principle 3 Evaluating the impact on the performance of the organisation

- The impact that learning and development has on performance is evaluated at several levels. Examples included:
 - Pre and post training evaluation forms
 - Monthly 1:1s
 - Six monthly and annual appraisal discussions
 - Catch up meetings with the Training Manager
 - Discussions held during staff meetings
 - Branch managers' monthly meetings
 - Weekly branch reports
 - Coaching and mentoring sessions
 - Monthly financial and performance reports
- Any external training that is seen to be of particular is recommended for the future and courses that do not deliver are either not used again, or are revised to ensure that the anticipated outcome is achieved.
- Continuous improvements have been achieved as result of the Chief Executive's ongoing review of management capacity. New appointments to the management team are in line with the organisation's values and cultural needs.
- The successful winning of a particular tender in the face of fierce competition will now enable 1st Choice to operate in a completely different market sector – this will enhance the Consultants' knowledge, skills and expertise even further.
- Finally, interviewees believe that a genuine and sustained commitment exists within the company to provide security of employment, as well as to grow and develop the business, demonstrated in the trust, confidence and respect employees have developed for the Chief

Executive and her particular inspirational and motivational leadership style.

6 CONCLUSION

Having conducted the review in accordance with IIP UK and The Assessment Network's guidelines I am very pleased to confirm that 1st Choice Recruitment continues to be recognised as an Investor in People.

7 QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Assessment Network Ltd is responsible for the quality assurance of this assessment and will invite a representative from 1st Choice Recruitment to take part in a quality assurance questionnaire. The questionnaire was devised by IIP UK with the objective of receiving client feedback in order to provide a consistent approach to the assessment and recognition process. Further details will be supplied by The Assessment Network in due course.

My thanks go to 1st Choice for the hospitality kindly provided over the review visit. Special thanks must go to Gaynor for all the help and support given to me, as well as thanks to all those who took part in the IIP discussions for providing masses of positive evidence in such a good humoured manner! This review was a real pleasure to conduct; despite the difficulties encountered during this trading year 1st Choice is a shining example of what an Investor in People should be!

Jeannette Stanley, IIP Assessor, 21 December 2009.