

Improving Staff Selection at Chesterton

Chesterton was a major provider of property-related services across the UK before problems in its commercial property business forced the firm into receivership in March 2005.

At the time, residential sales had held up, despite the depressed domestic housing market. So while the commercial and property asset management businesses were disbanded—with the loss of approximately 500 of the firm's 700 staff—the residential sales and lettings business was acquired as a going concern by investment firms CiC International and Consensus Business Group.

"We faced a huge HR challenge when we came out of receivership," said Karen Orr, HR Director at Chesterton. "But it was also a chance to start again with a completely clean slate. Staff turnover in the residential business had long been a concern and so we seized the opportunity to really strive to become an employer of choice. We developed an innovative new HR strategy and made it our priority to recruit and retain the best people, so our customers would enjoy the benefit of exceptional service from established teams." Keen to enhance its staff selection process, the firm met with Kenexa®.

"From the start, we were very impressed with Kenexa," said Orr. "The company has experts in assessment and had experience in helping similar businesses to ours."

Performance Profiles

Kenexa conducted a job analysis training workshop for two members of Chesterton's HR team to enhance their ability to review roles and develop performance profiles.

"Kenexa gave us the templates and expertise we needed to create a range of focused but generic job descriptions for our staff," said Orr. "We then ran a series of internal workshops to develop performance profiles for coordinators, property consultants and managers, giving us the framework from which to develop profiles at all levels in the new structure—including our newly created area manager roles."

Competency Framework

Kenexa also developed a competency framework for Chesterton. The competencies—which include customer focus, problem solving, communication, team working, quality orientation, inspiring success, and negotiating and influencing others—are ranked so that each role has its own level of competency.

"We use the competency framework for staff selection and we've also incorporated it into our performance management process," said Orr. "Managers appraise their staff against the competencies and we provide training to meet the development needs."

Personality Questionnaires

To gain a more accurate picture of the traits and preferences of candidates who apply for branch-based roles, Chesterton decided to use Kenexa's Rapid Personality Questionnaire (RPQ) as part of its selection process. Used online, the RPQ provides insights into personality characteristics such as relationships with people, thinking and problem-solving styles, emotions and drives, risk-taking and decision-making style, team-working approach and leadership/subordinate style.

Kenexa undertook a validation study of existing staff to identify the behaviors and attributes of optimal candidates.

"Now, when candidates complete the RPQ, we can easily compare their results against our ideal personality profile and identify areas of match and mismatch," said Orr. "The RPQ highlights any issues or areas of concern that the interviewer may need to probe further and it provides the basis for a meaningful discussion on areas relevant to the job."

Chesterton also uses Kenexa's Occupational Personality Inventory (OPI) when recruiting for its managerial posts. A more sophisticated questionnaire, the OPI covers 25 different personality attributes, resulting in an in-depth understanding of a candidate.

Interviewing Skills

Kenexa conducted an interviewing skills training course for all 50 of Chesterton's sales and lettings managers.

"The course highlighted how to use the RPQ and how to conduct competency-based interviews," said Orr. "This really helped the managers to improve their interview skills and their questioning techniques."

New Recruitment Process

Chesterton has brought its recruitment process in-house. As a first step, an HR adviser conducts a telephone interview with most applicants to complete the initial sift. The next stage is an interview with a manager and a member of the HR team. Candidates then go on to complete either the RPQ or the OPI online, depending on the role for which they are applying. Final interviews are then held, using the personality questionnaire results, with a manager and a departmental director.

Positioned For Growth

Back from receivership, like a phoenix from the flames, Chesterton has re-established its position as the market leader.

"To provide a superior service, we need to recruit and retain enthusiastic, hard working and conscientious people, who have the drive and determination to succeed," said Orr. "With help from Kenexa, we now have initiatives in place to achieve that, and there is a feeling of increased confidence about the business."

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866.391.9557

About Chesterton

Chesterton is one of England's oldest and best known residential estate agencies. With 16 London-based branches, it was founded in 1805 by the uncle of writer GK Chesterton. Website: www.chesterton.co.uk