



# EMPLOYEE TRAINING INVESTMENTS PAY HIGH DIVIDENDS

With Examples from  
Winners of the UK Employee Experience Awards 2018

Foreword by Ben Whitter,  
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# FOREWORD

Work is all about experiences, and **every experience counts.**

Employee Experience is one of the most important aspects of business in the UK, and the UK Employee Experience Awards (EXA) is the premier celebration of that. As Chair of the EXA, I have heard of some truly amazing EX initiatives that are raising the standard for other businesses.

To deliver an exceptional customer experience, companies must first deliver an exceptional employee experience. As part of that, the learning experiences that a company cultivates are an essential path to growth and prosperity. While many may choose to offer a broad range of training and learning experiences, the companies that stand out are the ones that focus their efforts on specific programmes that are strongly aligned with tangible business outcomes. Learning experiences designed in this way, and based on key data from within the business, can chart a practical journey for employees to grow within the company. This focus will support a strong and sustainable pipeline of fostered talent that is then ready for future business needs.

Yet, this is not simply about the company and the learning programmes it decides to bring in.

What is interesting and impactful is when employees share knowledge and upskill the colleagues around them. There has never been a better time for companies to create a strong connection with their employees by co-creating elements of the learning experience with them, rather than for them. When people talk about companies being too slow to adapt to changing consumer behaviours and expectations, or a failure to create and scale new ideas, what they are really talking about is a lack of intentional development and targeted investment in a company's community of employees.

When expanding impact and influence in the marketplace, it is wise to equip employees with new skills, capabilities, and experiences. This is the ultimate win-win scenario, and through targeted investment, companies and employees can create more value for their customers, and in turn, generate strong commercial returns.

As we learn to integrate and embrace new technology and new ideas into our workplaces, it is undoubtedly an incredibly disruptive time in the economy. What will differentiate the best from the rest will be the ability to build high-value and integrated learning experiences, which are delivered across platforms, on and off-line, and are focused on sustaining growth for the business and individual.

It is no big secret that the most successful organisations in the world are hungry for the latest knowledge and invest heavily, with money and time, in the development of their people. Some examples of this can be seen in the following case studies of three UK Employee Experience Awards winners BT, DPD, and River Island. Each company developed its own way of empowering staff with the skills needed to succeed.

These companies have shown that in the end, you grow, we grow, is not a bad mantra for any organisation to embrace.



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Ben is currently Chair of the UK Employee Experience Awards and is known as Mr Employee Experience in business circles for his role as a global Employee Experience (EX) leader. His role brings him into contact with many companies keen to improve how they accommodate their most important resource – their staff.

## The UK's

current unemployment rate of 4.0% is the lowest since February 1975. Universities are cranking out skilled workers as fast as they can, but recruitment managers complain that qualified prospects are hard to find.

It's no wonder that UK firms - including winners in the 2018 UK Employee Experience Awards' learning and development category - are shifting their focus. Instead of trying to find and recruit qualified candidates, they're investing in bespoke educational programmes that let them develop a stream of highly skilled employees, tailoring the curriculum to each company's unique needs.

Education helps employees succeed, but as these three firms' experiences illustrate, growing your own next generation of skilled workers can be a strategic element of corporate success too.





## LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT – BRONZE AWARD

### RIVER ISLAND

#### River Island Focuses On Careers

A 30-year-old family-owned business, River Island designs and sells fashionable clothing online and through 300 retail clothing stores throughout the UK. The company has about 11,000 employees.

A 2015 assessment of employees discovered that only about 7% bothered to participate in formal performance appraisals. Managers didn't give meaningful feedback to employees and staff members reported that they didn't feel supported by their supervisors. About half of the company's employees reported that they were unaware of in-house employee training programmes. Staffers said they trusted their supervisors but didn't find them inspiring.

River Island accepted the survey results as a wake-up call, launching a series of programmes to make fundamental changes in the relationship between the company and its employees.

Central to the change was a new understanding of the role of staff development. Instead of focusing on making sure employees had the skills that the company needed, management shifted attention to employees and their needs. The company discontinued annual performance appraisals, replacing them with an interactive career-development programme in which management's role shifted to providing training and resources to support employees in reaching their own career goals.



# RIVER ISLAND

River Island describes the change as a shift from “training teams” to “learning teams”. The company has launched no fewer than six programmes to support the transformation.

“Model the Way” is a management-development initiative that helps managers demonstrate best practices and attitudes instead of simply lecturing employees about them. More than 700 managers have taken Model the Way training so far. The programme focus on career development and performance conversations that help employees understand that the company is committed to helping them reach their career goals.

It isn't just line managers who are adopting new practices. River Island has also implemented a director-level leadership development programme intended to make its top execs more effective and inspiring as leaders.

The company has created online resources, including documents and videos, to help new employees get grounded and productive more quickly. The system is available even before employees start work. CEO Ben Lewis has made a commitment to attend each induction to welcome new employees to the company, and a buddy system pairs new employees with experienced workers.

The River Island Virtual Academy is the heart of the company's new educational programme. It's an online learning system created in partnership with Ashridge Business School. RIVA gives employees access to learning resources on countless topics, from leadership to dealing with change. RIVA courses use video learning, podcasts, books, and e-learning technology. It's all available 24/7 on employees' computers and mobile devices.

River Island has expanded RIVA to allow staff members to create and share their own video courses via the RIVA Connect programme. RIVA Connect lets employees learn technical skills from peers in other departments. River Island says it has helped break down silos and has encouraged cross-department relationships and employee migration.

In addition to online resources, the company has created focused workshops - no longer than three hours - in particular, skills. Attendance is optional, but the company has created incentives to promote successful completion of workshop blocks.

Finally, the RI Pride Awards allow employees to nominate their peers for upholding high standards or demonstrating excellent performance. Reading about other employees' outstanding work is itself an education, the company says.

## LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT – SILVER AWARD

### DPD

#### Thinking Big At Dpd

With 12,500 employees and an annual turnover of nearly £1.1 billion, DPD is the company to beat in the UK parcel-delivery business. Company revenues climbed from fourth place to the number one position in the parcels market since 2010, and management is not inclined to slow corporate growth. DPD says it intends to maintain its growth and climb to £2.3 billion in revenue by 2025, with 28,000 employees and 85 depots - up from the current 57. DPD has identified milestones and challenges along the way to the company's ambitions. Among the challenges is a shortage of qualified shift managers.

Each shift manager leads, inspires, and motivates as many as 30 delivery drivers every morning, debriefs them in the evening, and ensures that they meet company targets for productivity, service, and costs. DPD says shift managers play an essential role in transforming the company's service ambitions into actual performance.

DPD's growth plans call for the addition of at least 196 shift managers in five years. That's why the company launched its Summer Camp programme in 2016.

Summer Camp is a three-week intensive training programme specifically intended to help delivery drivers qualify for positions as shift managers. The curriculum includes training on assessing service performance, route-planning tools, health and safety, security, transport procedures, depot performance targets, answers to driver queries, cost management, and more.

DPD prefers to recruit and train shift managers from its crew of delivery drivers, who already understand the basics of the parcels business. But rapid growth has increased the company's reliance on self-employed franchisees, whose numbers have grown from 50% to 80% of DPD's drivers. The addition of thousands of franchisees has helped support DPD's growth, but it has resulted in a smaller pool of staff-member drivers to be trained and promoted into shift management.

Traditionally, enrollment in management training programmes has been limited to staff members. DPD broke with tradition by opening up the Summer Camp programme to self-employed franchisee drivers. In fact, it made recruiting those drivers into staff management positions a priority.

In its first year, Summer Camp trained 62 drivers for shift management roles, including 47 former franchisees. DPD is well on its way to its goal of 196 new shift managers within five years.

Better yet, the company estimates it has saved £90,000 in external recruitment costs, with projected savings of £400,000 over five years.

DPD is so pleased with the results that it is doubling-down on its Summer Camp commitment. The programme will now run all year instead of just in the summer, giving more potential managers an opportunity to participate. The programme is expanded from three weeks to four weeks. The company has appointed a recruitment expert to reach out to potential management trainees. And the programme will increase its focus on locales where acute shortages of shift managers are forecast.



## LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT – CATEGORY WINNER

### BT WITH BLUE SKY



### Bt Business Bets on Great Conversations

The customer service organisation at BT Business and Public Sector comprises 7,000 professionals serving 1.2 million customers in the UK and Ireland. The team supports customers who use the full range of BTPS products, ranging from straightforward telephone lines to complex international IT networks.

In 2016, management took a hard look at operations and competitive data and concluded that customer service procedures and systems were overdue for an update. Since customer service is key to the success of a telecom services company, BTPS Customer Service opened its wallet, investing in expert services and proven solutions from external firms.



The company hired Blue Sky to advise them on behaviour changes to deliver improved business outcomes. They contracted with Medallia for advanced software that captures and analyses customer feedback. They hired Accenture to handle installation and deployment of software systems.

BTPS Customer Service and its contractors started by studying the existing business for barriers to excellent customer service. They found, for example, that employees weren't able to access and search customer feedback easily. This data was crucial for identifying the best opportunities for improved service, and access to it was critical.

Analysis of service calls revealed that less than 1% of calls were being identified as sales leads and passed along to the relevant department. A Blue Sky analysis showed that 10% of BTPS Customer Service's staff members were generating as much revenue as the rest of the business combined.

It was these insights that led to the BTPS Customer Service Great Conversations programme, an initiative intended to capture and share the best practices of the company's top performers.

Managers identified nine "key advisor skills" that differentiated the company's best customer service professionals, known within the company as advisors. The skills - known to staff members as advocate, purposeful small talk, signpost and set up, inform, know your onions, brilliant batons, effortless language, anchor expectations, and nurture the lead - are the foundation of the Great Conversations training programme. They help staff members ensure that they are conforming to best practices and effective processes. Managers and coaches use the advisor skills as the curriculum for assessing and improving performance.

The team also installed a system called Rosita that logs and captures staff coaching sessions for reuse. Rosita serves as a library of best practices training and it is accessible to staff members on PCs and mobile devices. Rosita allows staff members to rate their coaches, which has resulted in a renewed focus and commitment to staff training within the organisation.

BTPS Customer Service invested millions of pounds in the Great Conversations programme and associated tools, and the organisation is convinced it made the right decision. Results include a 36-point rise in NPS for customer interactions, a 22-point improvement in customer relationships, a 34% rise in sales order value, and a nine-point rise in employee engagement. The team reports that MP complaints have dropped from 170 in the first quarter of 2016/7 to 41 in the third quarter.



## TRAINING FOR RESULTS

Training and education programmes help build employee engagement and contribute to loyalty. Given the high cost of recruitment, it's easy to justify an investment in training that makes employees more likely to stay with the company longer.

Education also makes employees more valuable to the company. In addition to improving their motivation and morale, training gives employees the skills they need to make bigger contributions.

Employee training programmes increase the pool of potential managers who already know and embrace the company's business and culture - candidates who are known to make better, more effective managers.

And as these three companies have found, an investment in training is a productive and cost-effective alternative to locating and hiring workers who have acquired their skills elsewhere.

The most valuable employees, it seems, are made, not found.

## THE UK EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE AWARDS

The UK Employee Experience Awards is one of the most innovative and creative events in the calendar for employee-centric businesses across the UK.

If your company has developed an initiative that puts employees at its heart, then enter the awards and have the chance to stand on the podium next year.

You can learn more about the UK Employee Experience Awards [here](#).

