

Action, not words

Active senior management commitment is the key to success as Huthwaite International implements behaviour change at Živnostenská Banka (Zivno) – and it delivers measurable bottom-line benefits, too.

Much is said about the importance of securing senior management buy-in to sales and other management training programmes.

The reality, however, is that – more often than not – little more than lip service is paid to executive involvement once project budgets are signed off, reflecting an ‘everybody below me needs training’ management approach. Consequently, the results of investment in such training tend to fall well short of expectations in delivering lasting and quantifiable performance gains.

Are we right to read cause and effect into this? Recent work on behaviour change undertaken by Huthwaite at Czech bank Zivno makes a strong case for such a direct causal link and provides an object lesson for change programmes everywhere.

Taking an integrated approach following its acquisition of majority shareholdings in seven Eastern European banks, Milan-based bank Unicredito Italiano appointed Huthwaite in mid-2004 to help embed a fully customer-centric sales approach.

Huthwaite’s strongly research-based methodology, financial services experience and

international network were ideally suited to Unicredito’s demands, which went much further than simply sales skills training. What the bank needed was a credible, high-quality approach to cultural and behaviour change which would be consistent across national boundaries and, critically, link directly with other change projects already under way.

It was agreed that Huthwaite’s SPIN®-based behaviour change programme would be trialled at Unicredito’s Czech subsidiary, Zivno. Before undertaking any staff training, it was essential that senior management understood, and bought into, the methodologies involved and would be able to provide effective ongoing support, in part by speaking a common language.

Management support

As a first step, the Huthwaite team undertook a field assessment of the three lines of business – Corporate, Private and Retail banking – and presented its findings at a ‘top team’ event to launch the project. This one-day workshop, attended by senior members of both Zivno and Unicredito, included a number of distinct strands and proved to be a pivotal point in the development process.

Based on its recent observation, Huthwaite gave a ‘warts and all’ assessment of Zivno’s starting point, specifically the quality of its customer

relationships, and then explored how behaviour change is about much more than skills training.

At the same time, in order to put together an action plan in which all senior managers could play an active support role in securing long-lasting change, it was essential to flush out all potential barriers and deal with them at the outset. Issues around prioritisation, for example, had to be addressed in order to ensure that sufficient time was dedicated to the effective delivery of both training and reinforcement.

In order to create the right environment for such radical change, Zivno recognised that the programme should be seen not as ‘just another HR initiative’ but as a business-driven strategy. Therefore Marco Berini, head of HR management and development for Zivno, was



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Head of HR management and development



appointed as SPIN® 'champion' and tasked to work closely with the Huthwaite team in making it all happen. This was achieved, for example, by developing a co-ordinated communications programme which included high-profile articles on the importance of behaviour change, by-lined by senior managers, in the company magazine.

'Quick wins' soon appeared, reflecting early successes, and the communications strategy capitalised on these by dedicating part of Zivno's intranet to the 'change behaviour, change results' programme, including interviews with internal trainers designed to generate a high level of interest and receptiveness in advance for those attending the courses.

Coaching and measurement

Zivno's own staff were prepared by Huthwaite to deliver the training, and management underwent coaching training. Crucially the COO, Sandro Bianco, personally endorsed the importance of this follow-up by having weekly briefings using detailed data analysis to ensure that sales managers were maintaining a high level of coaching activity to sustain performance improvement.

As Berini wryly points out: "As a branch manager, knowing you could get a call from the COO at any time to check on coaching activity was just the stimulus needed to make it happen!"

Training individual branches across the three business lines, and recording results from the coaching, enabled performance to be closely measured against a control group – in each case, both at a behavioural and results level. The results speak for themselves; in the three months following the initial trial, for example, the SPIN® group recorded an improvement in the level of selling-up and new business of some 38% over the control group.

Critically, Unicredito recognised that investing in its staff through training was an integral part of the success of a broader long-term strategy and not, as is often the case, simply an afterthought. Including coaching and measurement as key parts of the behaviour change programme also played a major role in achieving some outstanding results.

However, there is no doubt that it has been the whole-hearted and highly visible commitment of Zivno's directors and managers which has contributed directly to a level of sustained improvement almost unparalleled in my experience.

Unicredito has now commissioned Huthwaite International to repeat the project at its Polish acquisition, Bank Pekao SA.

Paul Loxley
Huthwaite Consultant



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