

Seagate

We turn on ideas

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“We attribute our success to a sound business strategy and exceptional strength in technical competences, which provides the flexibility to respond quickly and intelligently to changes inherent across our industry”

SEAGATE TECHNOLOGY

Lifelong learning for employees is a crucial component of Seagate's success and a large percentage of their capital, time and resources is invested to ensure that staff are not only trained within their job role but also have the opportunity to develop themselves further.

Seagate was founded in 1979 in Scotts Valley, California, USA. It has over 44,000 employees worldwide with an annual revenue of \$6.1 billion. In 1993 Seagate Springtown was announced and the construction of the site commenced. When the company began production in January 1994 it was estimated that it would employ 500 employees, at present the facility employs in excess of 1100 employees including a research and development department.

The facility manufactures read/write recording heads for hard disk drives through a complicated process of photolithography and electro-plating which is carried out in a state of the art (class 100) cleanroom environment.

Seagate believe in empowerment of staff at all levels and they have proved this by being accredited with Investors in People in November 1999 and re-accredited in October 2002. The company

proactively seeks to get involved in partnership approaches to education and training which can also be used to sustain profitability. This includes sponsorship and support for local education initiatives, opportunities for graduates and young people in enterprise and contributing staff time to reading programmes in local schools.

Seagate first became involved in NVQs in July 1999 when 68 trainers and lead operators embarked on the Training and Development NVQ level 3. The NVQ programme has now extended to include Supervisory Management level 3, Performing Manufacturing Operations level 2 and Technical Services level 3.

The Technical Services NVQ in particular has made a tremendous impact on a specific group of employees in Springtown. These Operators were unable to progress to a higher pay band awarded to Process Technician positions because they lacked the appropriate qualification. The criteria required that they have 1 years experience plus an ONC in Engineering or Science. Although a number of Operators had the necessary experience and held A levels in Science, Seagate specifically required the ONC as it was deemed *“more technical”*. The employees felt frustrated with the lack of promotion opportunities.



GARETH HOUSTON
TRAINING MANAGER



"We found it quite frustrating on the Support Specialist grade. Due to the educational criteria set out there were 12 employees left on this grade without any possibility of promotion. On grade 13 there is a set progression path for promotion through to higher grades, dependant on annual performance review. For the grade 12 positions this career progression did not exist, leaving employees feeling a bit in limbo. As some of the most experienced 'techs', we would have done a lot of the training of the newer grade 13s, who then progressed through higher grades in a way that we couldn't."

Seagate however was also experiencing difficulty in recruiting to the higher paid position. Given the number of experienced Operators who were applying over the years it was decided to reduce the grade to a grade 12 to cater for this group and change the title to Engineering Support Specialist. Therefore although the Process Technicians and Support Specialists did the same job the Support Specialist was a grade lower due to the qualification criteria.

After running a number of NVQ programmes with Production Trainers the employees requested that the Training Manager approach Seagate in order for the

organisation to consider that a level 3 in Technical Services would meet their requirements to "upgrade" the current Support Specialists from grade 12 to 13, especially as they were already performing the same work role. Seagate agreed that a level 3 was equivalent to an ONC provided the NVQ was in a relevant discipline such as Technical Services. The NVQ was therefore able to fill this requirement and all these employees achieved their promotion on completion.

"On completion of the NVQ level 3 the grade 12 position no longer exists, everyone has been promoted. With the progression path which has now been opened up for us many have now been promoted up to a grade 15. This promotion was very positive for us in our work roles, not to mention the pay rise that went with it."

As well as opening up promotion opportunities these employees felt that the NVQ gave them a structure for critical problem solving and it changed the way they thought about their work role.

"With the NVQ level 3 starting up for us, there was initially some resistance from a few people that they had to go through the process, when already doing the same job. This was quickly put aside with the realisation that completing the NVQ would bring many improvements. The process of completing the NVQ brought a whole new way of thinking for us."

Although the basic concept simply involved writing up what we did in our jobs anyway, the structure of the work gave us a new way to look at things. It also gained us some experience in presenting data to groups of people, which some of us had never been involved with."

All the NVQ candidates are very positive about their experiences and the direct support they have received from Seagate and they all would like to continue further with their education and personal development by commencing the NVQ level 4 in Engineering.



"So in summary this was a win-win situation for us, more money, a career progression path for the future and a new way of looking at our jobs, giving a better and more structured approach to looking at problems. So much so that a group of us are now starting the NVQ level 4. Watch this space."

Ursula Devine, Process Technician

The NVQ programme is only one example of how Seagate encourages employees to participate in lifelong learning. Over the past 3 years there has been over 550 applications for tuition assistance which have been granted, with a spend of over £300,000. These applications are related to the job role of employees or have the potential for career development and have included courses from A levels to PhDs.

There has also been the introduction of "My Learning" with over 100 courses available on-line. To assist with

this on-line learning Seagate provides 28 computers, 3 of which are situated within the canteen.

Seagate is convinced that training contributes to the loyalty of employees and extremely low staff turnover and this in effect has a direct impact on the business success of the organisation. To celebrate this success, and the success of the individual employees who participate in learning, Seagate's Managing Director hosts an awards ceremony and proudly displays the results of training in local press, notice boards and company magazine.

"We're delighted with the success we've had with the Technical Services NVQ programme. By building upon the existing experience and knowledge of these employees, we've provided essential technical expertise for the facility while at the same time motivating and retaining employees through career development and promotion."

John Spangler, MD - Springtown

