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Everything training related has changed in recent months with the Learning and Skills Council coming to an end. Regionally SEEDA, the development agency is working with the new Skills Board to work out the future of Training and Skills in the South East.

Meanwhile, training will continue and this feature explores what the region's training providers are offering in 2010.

Competence gap

Effective management of staff development is key to every firm's future. A simple but effective method is to develop a competency based framework writes Sue Berry, director of

TimelessTime Ltd.

To do this you need to know what competences you have now, what you need for the future, and how you are going to develop your people to bridge the gap. A core principle is that competence can be divided into four levels.

A "trainee" is just beginning his/her learning and would need to be fully supervised. A "supervised practitioner" is able to undertake many aspects of the job but would require their work to be checked. A "practitioner" is competent in

all aspects of the role. Finally an "expert" has extensive experience, is fully competent and would supervise and train others.

To determine the competencies needed, list all the roles. Then determine the competencies in each role. Next list the levels of each competence needed to support the future business. It's common for firms to need one expert, one or two practitioners, a number of supervised practitioners and one trainee for each competence in each role per ten man group, but the exact balance depends totally on the business.

The large number of rows and columns of people and competencies that results lends itself to management using MS Excel. To assess what you have today, score each person and their competence level.

Once you've done that, determine the competence gap and decide what staff development action needs to be taken to bridge it. Cost the development and meet with each person in

the organisation and get them to commit to change.

Sounds simple? In principle it is, but for success, manage staff buy-in and think how you are going to be consistent across all staff, roles and competencies.



Educating clients

Business coaching firm ActionCOACH plans to double its 20 coaches covering Kent, Surrey and East and West Sussex. Although ActionCOACH has been operating in the UK for eight years now, many business owners are unclear on the differences between coaching, training and consulting.

Kent based action coach Nick Dougan said: "The fact there is some confusion is understandable, as the business coaching concept is still new in the UK and there is a degree of overlap between coaching, consulting and training.

"Hire a consultant, and you are usually hiring people with specific expertise, to fix a problem that you have already identified, and often the consultant will do the work for you, working on your issue for weeks or months at a time.

"Traditional training tends to involve following a syllabus set by the training provider. While this approach can be great at imparting knowledge, especially early in people's careers, business owners trying to address specific issues can firstly have difficulty identifying the most suitable course, and then, secondly, actually applying what they have learned in the real world. Taking it from theory to reality is often the main challenge.

"While coaches can bring lots of ideas and strategies, the emphasis is on educating clients so that they can do it for themselves – and are not, therefore,

forever dependent on a consultant's expertise."

ActionCOACH also runs group coaching programmes which are a halfway house between one to one coaching and conventional training. These include planning days at which business owners are coached through detailed planning for the following 90 days, and a fortnightly evening programme introducing new business ideas in a way that enables owners to apply them effectively to their own needs. The next 90 day planning sessions take place in Sevenoaks on 4 February, and in Tunbridge Wells on 19 February.

How to hook customers

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