



The Employee Engagement Network Visit to Specsavers Contact Centre, Nottingham

Specsavers' vision as an employer is to "treat people as we would want to be treated ourselves" and to support staff to be the best they can be. A sense of partnership with staff is "at the heart of everything we do" as is giving something back to local communities. The key message is "keep it simple, get it done and deliver on our promises."

UKWON's September 2011 Employee Engagement Network meeting was hosted by Specsavers at Cirrus House in Nottingham, the base for the company's Contact Centre operations. Opened in 2006, the Centre grew rapidly to support over 10 different services across the Specsavers business and now has circa 100 employees. The Centre provides services for optical and hearing customers including sales, customer service and customer retention. Since becoming a multi-lingual centre in 2010 the Contact Centre supports services in four foreign languages: Swedish, Finnish, Norwegian and Dutch.

The Centre has won a number of accolades including fifth place in the Top 50 Call Centres for Customer Service in 2010. Specsavers Joint Managing Director John Perkins stated: "This is a tremendous achievement for the Contact Centre team and reinforces our continuing focus on delivering outstanding levels of customer service. For us, Nottingham is a big part of that. The Centre's achievement surpassed many other more established contact centres including Asda, Coca-Cola and BUPA." The Centre was also a finalist in the 2011 Customer Experience Award, Training Team of the Year Award and the Customer Contact Innovation Awards.

Employee engagement challenges faced by Specsavers Contact Centre included a high change environment, a lower engagement level from long tenured members of staff, repetitive work and a target driven culture. Investment in engagement focusing on employee development, improving the working environment, creating a supportive culture and recognition of effort has achieved a financial return in terms of enhanced business performance. Response rates to Specsavers' annual engagement survey rose from 30% in 2006 to 94% in 2010.

Recruitment and engagement of committed team leaders and senior managers is a key component of successful engagement, as is the visibility of the CEO who meets with employees on the anniversary of their recruitment to Specsavers each year. Job rotation is encouraged to enable staff to gain work experience in other areas of the business, giving them an opportunity to develop new skills and understanding of the company as a whole. This helps to develop core competencies and flexibility while improving job enrichment and promotion opportunities and common behaviours throughout Specsavers.

During a tour of the Contact Centre, Network participants experienced first-hand how the specially designed work environment promotes effective team working and communication. Each department has a separate "Buzz Space" with a large whiteboard for "share and learn" sessions, to facilitate group creativity and to enable colleagues to teach each other skills. The presence of numerous and well-used "Shout Boards" in each department was testament to how staff recognise the actions and achievements of colleagues.

Positive evaluation and feedback from participants reflected their warm welcome, an excellent presentation by Head of Contact Centre Services Jonathan George, an enlightening tour and a stimulating discussion.

Specsavers Facts

- Specsavers was founded by Doug and Dame Mary Perkins in 1984 and is now the largest privately owned opticians in the world.
- The couple still run the company, along with their three children. Their son John is joint managing director.
- Specsavers has more than 1,500 stores throughout the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Spain, Australia and New Zealand.
- Annual turnover for the Specsavers Group was £1.36 billion for 2009/10 and is forecast to reach £1.55 billion in 2010/11.
- Specsavers optical stores and hearing centres are owned and run by joint venture or franchise partners. Together, they offer both optical and hearing services under one roof.
- Specsavers employs more than 26,000 staff.
- Specsavers was voted Britain's most trusted brand of opticians for the ninth year running by the Reader's Digest Trusted Brands survey 2010.
- More than one in three people who wear glasses in the UK buy them from Specsavers; 9,700,000 glasses were exported from the warehouse to stores in 2009.
- Specsavers was ranked No 1 for both eye tests and glasses in the UK.
- Specsavers is the largest retail provider of home delivery contact lenses in Europe and one of the top two retail suppliers of continuous wear lenses in the world.
- Specsavers is now the largest retail dispenser of digital hearing aids in the UK and offers a hearing service from more than 400 locations.
- Specsavers supports numerous optical and hearing charities, including Guide Dogs and Hearing Dogs for Deaf People. During its three-year support for Diabetes UK it raised more than £250,000 to fund various projects.
- Since 2003 more than a quarter of a million glasses have been collected and recycled by Specsavers stores on behalf of Vision Aid Overseas for use in developing countries. Specsavers has raised over £370,000 for the charity since 2006, with almost £245,000 going towards its work in Zambia.