

Professional Development at Silversands



By Gary Jensen

Silversands has been providing consultancy services to our customers for over thirty years and maintains a reputation for quality and excellence. A key component of this is the experience, knowledge and skills of our consultants, who constantly strive to provide our customers with a service that we can be proud of.

As technological, social and economic factors have changed, so Silversands has had to adapt and one area that we have reviewed is that of staff development, and particularly how the different generations like to work, learn and progress their careers.

To this end, we have created a Professional Development Programme (PDP), which is intended to ensure that our service quality is maintained whilst providing our staff with training, guidance, goals and targets. More specifically, this programme:

- Formalises the process of professional development
- Enables our staff to understand what elements of training and exams they need to complete to transition through our various job roles.
- Standardises our delivery of professional development
- Enables our managers to track where their staff are in the process.

Originally developed around our technical team, the PDP covers all roles, including professional services, sales, admin, finance and marketing. It encompasses induction, professional and technical skills.

For the technical side, we identify which skills are required based on the role that the employee is performing and create a programme of training that will take them to the level of knowledge that is required for them to deliver the services, projects or functions appropriate to that role.

For the professional skills, we identify the areas of capability that will be needed. For a professional services role this might include running customer meetings, writing pre-sales documents, delivering technical workshops and so on. For marketing it might be engaging with marketing agencies & designers and running seminars or webinars. Whichever role it is, the programme is shaped appropriately and is targeted based on the employee's knowledge and experience.

This programme of technical and professional development is delivered using methods including self-learning, online training and group knowledge transfer. In addition to this, though, we also have peer mentoring, with each staff member in the programme assigned one or more mentors,

specifically charged with guiding, assisting and sharing knowledge, as necessary. In addition, the employee both shadows and is shadowed on various relevant activities.

This Professional Development Programme represents a significant investment for Silversands but we believe the benefits are worth it:

- Transfer of knowledge and skills from our experienced staff
- Demonstration of a clear path to technical and professional excellence
- Clarity of requirements for employees to progress through our roles
- Traceability of our employees' progression
- Continuation of our historically good staff retention
- Protection of our industry reputation
- Enhancement of our already-excellent service to our customers.

From our employees' point of view, they will:

- Have a structured training plan to help them gain the requisite skills relevant to their role
- Gain knowledge and experience through peer mentoring
- Understand what their goals and targets are so that they can progress their careers
- Gain important skills, knowledge & experience that will help them in their future careers outside Silversands.

All our new starters are enrolled on the programme in their first week. In addition, we have integrated the PDP with our appraisals process so there is a continuous feedback loop. For existing staff this means that relevant objectives set through the appraisal process are developed into their own professional development plan.

The feedback from staff on this programme has been excellent, with many of them stating that it is above and beyond anything that they have had at their previous companies.

"I've learnt more in the last two weeks than I did in ten years at my previous company. Having a structured plan for learning and exams, as well as ongoing mentoring, is great." – Pete

"The structure, approach and clarity that the PDP delivers is great. I'm loving my new job." – Clarissa