

PROACTIVELY ADDRESSING SKILLS SHORTAGES

Skills shortages are plaguing various South African industries, yet unemployment numbers remain sky-high! SHEQ MANAGEMENT takes a look at how training can be the “one stone” that tackles these “two birds”

According to Cargo Carriers, a specialised transport, supply chain and logistics service provider, the shortage of skills is a major handbrake on business growth countrywide. Companies are, however, realising that the best way forward is to take responsibility for training and skills development.

“After rising fuel costs, the shortage of skills is the major challenge faced by road-freight service providers,” says Andre Jansen van Vuuren, divisional marketing director of Cargo Carriers. “That’s why Cargo Carriers is enforcing training and skills development. The company has been proactively engaged with the problem for several years. With the demise of the apprenticeship system, we have had little choice.”

Jansen van Vuuren adds that the skills

deficit is a problem from a technical as well as a managerial perspective. “The shortage of technical skills affects general operational efficiency. Our aim is to train technicians to a level that increases productivity and safety, health, environmental and quality (SHEQ) standards.”

He continues: “In the management area, it’s a business-sustainability issue. It’s about managing a growing business, while bringing people up from base level so that they really understand the culture of the company. It’s about producing managers with the company’s culture in their blood.”

The company’s hands-on approach is already bearing fruit. In 2012, the first management trainee (enrolled in 2010) completed her training and was placed within the group. “We’ve also had our first group of five apprentices come through the diesel mechanic training programme,” says

Jansen van Vuuren. “Two of them have successfully passed their exams and are now qualified diesel mechanics.”

He explains that, in general, finding good technical personnel is a major issue for the company. “There is most certainly a shortage of qualified diesel mechanics and, when you do find them, they come at a very high cost. So the apprenticeships that we are funding can only prove fruitful for us in the future.”

The company applies the same principle to management training, as Jansen van Vuuren explains. “We currently employ eight trainee managers. They all have a tertiary education, whether it’s a transport diploma or a degree in logistics or supply chain management.”

These trainee managers undergo training in every aspect of the business - which includes the marketing and sales,



operations, technical, admin and finance divisions. Jansen van Vuuren adds that the next step includes a 24-month audit learnership programme in conjunction with the Institute of Internal Auditors, to offer employees the relevant training within the internal audit and risk function.

As Cargo Carriers is proving, it is futile for companies to sit back and wait for the education system to produce the required skills on its own - the backlog is simply too great. A proactive approach to skills development, in every area of company activity, is required.

Jansen van Vuuren says it best: "The reality is that if you want to attract and retain skilled personnel, you have to ensure that the correct programmes are in place. You are, in effect, responsible for training your own skills."

Companies can outsource this function

to a number of training providers, but there are a few things to be mindful of, as Gary Singh - business manager at Sector Education and Training Authority (Seta)-accredited Occupational Health & Safety Training (OHST)-explains: "Training courses must be designed, facilitated and assessed with specific outcomes in mind."

He adds that it is advisable for organisations to train with Seta-approved institutions that offer courses aligned to approved unit standards. This will ensure that there are specific outcomes. "Additionally, there are four important aspects that an organisation must look at before choosing a training service provider (TSP)," Singh tells SHEQ MANAGEMENT.

These include whether the TSP's courses are approved by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) - or aligned to its unit standards. One should also check

whether the course has Seta-registered assessors or a facilitator who is a subject-matter expert, and whether it provides learner-centred training (including on-the-job coaching).

Singh points out that certain TSPs will need further accreditations if they're regulated by national government departments. "For example, OHST is further approved by the Department of Labour to provide training for First Aid Level 1, 2 and 3 - as stipulated in the Occupational Health & Safety Act, no. 85 of 1993."

He continues: "Another example is that even though the unit standard is verified by the Seta, the Department of Transport also has gazetted and approved training service providers (one of them being OHST) on the conveying of dangerous goods by road."

TSPs don't have to break your bank, however. "Organisations that pay skills-development levies can claim up to 70 percent back on the money they spend on educating and developing their staff."

This, according to the Services Seta webpage, includes any company that has an annual payroll exceeding R500 000 and staff who are registered for Employees' Tax - commonly referred to as Pay As You Earn (or PAYE).

The company must register with the South African Revenue Service (SARS) and pay a skills levy of one percent of the monthly payroll. "If the company doesn't fall within these criteria, it doesn't have to pay levies or register with SARS."

So, many companies don't have an excuse not to join the training revolution. "Employers must note, however, that training does not end in the classroom," says Singh. "They must provide effective supervision and coaching on the relevant outcomes once the learners exit the classroom." He adds that this is really important, or the training could be perceived as being ineffective.

The most important thing is to remember that people are the focal point of training, as they are an organisation's greatest asset ... "So, it makes perfect sense to ensure that your employees have the most effective training and education. This will maximise output and performance," Singh concludes. **| SHEQ**