

Retail to logistics iForce gains Investors in People accreditation

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Investors in People is a vital endorsement for FTSE companies and high street retailers seeking partners to provide third party services.

iForce is proud to announce it has gained Investors in People accreditation. This award endorses the large number of people-based initiatives and best practice now established in the UK's leading multi-channel specialist logistics operator has been integrating into its business over the last three years - believed to be essential as a fast growing company.

"For a medium sized company iForce has a huge number of people practices, extremely high standards and very talented people working for us," comments Judith Hesford, Human Resources Director at iForce who with her team guided iForce through the Investors in People process.

The Investors in People accreditation is particularly important in the eyes of the large FTSE businesses and high street retailers from whom iForce is winning business. When these kinds of companies seek partners to manage such business critical functions as e-fulfilment and returns processing, they are seeking a business that can demonstrate it carries out practices they would expect and consider to be fundamental.

"The Investors in People Accreditation endorses iForce's approach and shows that the company is on an equal business footing with its partners," says Mark Hewitt, CEO at iForce. "We see ourselves as more akin to retail than the logistics sector. Where a traditional logistics operator will deliver from a distribution centre to a shop, our e-fulfilment operations see us delivering directly to a customer's home so we are at the sharp end of any lapse in service levels. Equally, our returns processing service is directly involved in the customer experience of our retail clients. This makes us an intensive service business where Service Level Agreements are critical to maintain client relationships and continued business growth. Service, of course is founded on its people."

The Investors in People award recognises iForce's culture of high employee engagement and the multi-dimensional communication cascades it has developed through innovations such as colleague forums where employees can input their concerns and challenge ideas as well as receive business updates. The CEO's blog along with a bi - monthly Business Bulletin and colleague noticeboards are all important communication channels that help iForce keep in touch with its people.

A major iForce initiative contributing to the award is GCE (Growing Capability for Excellence). This is iForce's customised online review system, developed in conjunction with the specialists Learnpurple, which the company runs twice yearly with its management teams. GCE records critical competencies for people's jobs and talks about their objectives for the coming year in terms of significant improvement for the business. It also carries out a 'sense check' around the business by asking colleagues questions such as: How do you think we are doing? What would you rate us top on? What would you rate us bottom on?

Part of an employee review, rather than a simple employee survey, GCE alerts iForce to areas of concerns for its business. For example if the score on its role satisfaction rating is 5 or below, iForce takes a deep interest in understanding, by the individual, why that score is so low and follows through with director level discussions on the issues raised.

iForce has a full reporting suite to examine the information gathered by GCE to provide an accurate gauge not only of the company's talent capability but also how people are feeling.

"Growing businesses such as ours never have enough talent in their business; it's always a constraint," says Judith Hesford. "iForce occupies a fairly niche sector and cannot recruit from the employment market as easily as non-specialist logistics providers. So understanding our talent pool well and how people are doing is particularly important for our continued success. Through our employee engagement and positive people culture, we are developing our talent pool for our growth and we are consistently seeing that our high standards sometimes stretches those, we recruit from the logistics sector."

Whilst gaining Investors in People accreditation is not unusual in logistics, how well embedded these principals are within the culture of a company is significant. Judith adds: "For example, iForce achieves an incredibly low absence and employee turnover statistics when compared to the general logistics sector, where many managers we recruit in from, simply don't even know their rates and statistics."

iForce was assisted through the process by accredited Investors in People centre, WMQC. The Investors in People assessor reported: "We met 60 people at iForce and were impressed by the enthusiasm and passion showed by each of them. People enjoy working here and are proud to do so. The fact that there was not one single negative comment about communication was 'unique'. Wherever I went I was welcomed and the whole process ran smoothly."