

the personal touch

Ever wonder just how suited you are to the job you do? FIONA KEATING discovers a way to utilise yourself and your staff effectively

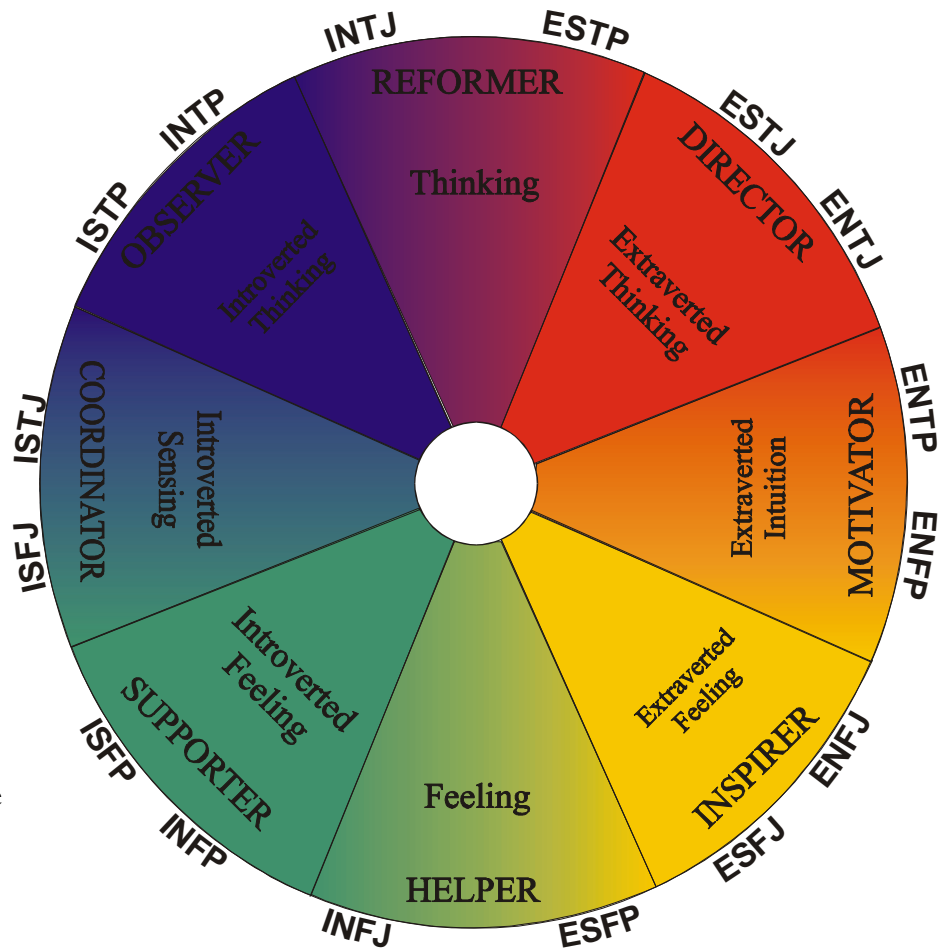
Using staff members in a role suitable for their personality is always a challenging task, however, the ever-expanding Human Resources services available from Business Link London North (BLLN) have added a new training programme that may just help you out - Psychometric Testing. The workshop offered is based on the 'Insights' model and is specifically designed for improving staff communication, focused recruitment and developing sales and motivational skills. The emphasis is on fun while being a business focused, participative solution to team management issues.

"Insights is the most powerful invention I have found for enabling team development. I have used it with great success for more than five years," says Trisha Jones of NatWest Life & Investment Services. Having undergone and benefited from the programme themselves, BLLN are keen to share the secret of their success.

Psychometrics or 'psychological testing' is the measurement of human characteristics such as aptitude, ability and personality. With organisations becoming more attentive to achieving real value from their employees, it is personality testing that has become the most popular way forward. It is widely accepted that what makes a company successful is its ability to hire and retain the right talent. A person who is understood, communicated with and valued tends to have greater motivation and loyalty to a company. BLLN believes the training can do as much for

profitability as the usual routes of increasing investment and technology.

Two of the most popular personality tests are Insights and Myers Briggs - both are based on the



This system can be used at every level within a company from the chief executive to the shop floor workers.

work of Dr Carl Jung. Myers Briggs consists of a set of questions and resulting report which uses a letter code to identify your personality type.

Insights (established in 1987), also uses assessment questions but its report uses a colour wheel to describe your characteristics. This is followed up with a workshop in which the

participants learn how this information can be integrated into everyday work situations. Maria Mullery of BLLN explains: "Although the word 'test' is used, this is not an examination where you can pass or fail and there is no implication of a 'good' or 'bad' personality. It is more about understanding and capitalising on differences between people rather than judging."

Maria Mullery and Sherine Maas of BLLN have undergone the training and are now qualified Insights facilitators. The emphasis of the workshop is having fun while learning. It begins with broad brush strokes to establish a common language. People are given a colour wheel and asked which colour they think they most and least identify with: Fiery Red - competitive, determined, direct, strong-willed; Sunshine Yellow - sociable, dynamic, enthusiastic, persuasive; Earth Green - caring, encouraging, sharing, patient, relaxed; Cool Blue - cautious, precise, questioning, formal, objective.

Everyone is encouraged to value each of the colours, recognising that every person in the team is unique and has something to offer. It can help identify who in the team is naturally a director, motivator, inspirer, helper, supporter, reformer, coordinator or observer. Teams are better placed to tackle group dynamic problems and psychometric testing is very effective in helping people understand how their behaviour impacts on others.

Prior to the workshop, a questionnaire is filled out by each of the team members. It comprises 25 multiple choice questions and takes about ten minutes to complete. The information is analysed and a personal, user-friendly, jargon-free report is given to each person during the morning session. Every new approach has its cynics but Sherine is confident: "What sells it is when they see their own reports. Most people I have dealt with have been inspired by the accuracy of the reports. When they see these things on paper about themselves, they ask: 'How do they know these things about me?'"

The system can be used at every level within a company, from the chief executive to the shop floor workers. The joy of sharing a common language is that a whole company can understand each other and have clear non-threatening communication. Charles Grimes, an Insights consultant enthuses, "I've heard clients say in a meeting: 'I see you've got your red hat on today' rather than 'you're losing it, you're going over the top'. It can help take the heat out of a situation."

In a recent survey conducted jointly by NLTEC and BLLN it was revealed that over half of local businesses are expecting to employ more staff in the forthcoming year. With Insights training there can be informed recruitment and promotion selections. It will be possible to read a potential candidate's strengths and weaknesses, as well as being aware of skills needed to complement the team as a whole.

For example, an employee who had been identified as a 'blue person' (precise and questioning), could be suited to working in a quality management role. A 'green person' (patient and relaxed), may thrive in areas which require dealing with the public. Sales and presentations can be improved by using these techniques which can help identify what type of person you are talking to and how to capitalise in a business situation.

The use of psychometric testing in business is on the increase and Insights is now operational in 40 countries and 18 languages. Up until recently this programme was primarily used in large companies such as Barclays, HSBC, and British Airways. Charles Grimes comments: "We are good for small and large businesses alike. Just because companies are big doesn't mean they have cash to waste. They are looking for bottom line results and this is what they feel they get. They use us because they get a very definite return." The course is flexible and Maria or Sherine at BLLN are happy to discuss how the programme can be tailored for your company's specific needs.

By offering local businesses psychometric testing, BLLN continue their commitment to help create a culture where employees are motivated to achieve goals. Understanding people, identifying their talents and knowing how they can best be matched to specific jobs, can make a real contribution to building a successful business. Jim Catterall, Development Manager at Axa Equity & Law, sums it up by saying: "In providing our organisation with a common language, Insights has led to increases in productivity and retention of salespeople."