

case study



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

Piper Assessment Limited



- **Staff turnover is low**
- **Renewed confidence in own abilities**
- **Improved customer service due to relaxed and open culture.**

Background

Size:	10 employees (including 5 part-time)
Sector:	Training and assessment services for the gas, electrical and construction industries
Location:	Swanley, Kent
Status:	Achieved Investors in People Standard in 2003; reassessed in 2005

The organisation

Swanley-based Piper Assessment is a training and assessment company covering a number of areas in the construction business, from gas and electrical installation to unvented hot water and building regulations. The company provides training and assessment products for people requiring mandatory independent assessment and qualification in these areas.

Piper Assessment's training ensures that individuals receive and complete the necessary assessments required to work in their fields. This is achieved through the use of innovative training products designed to meet the individual's needs directly. Examples include home study, theory courses and practical training. The company had originally specialised in assessments and training for gas installation, however changing market conditions in the early part of the millennium meant that the company had to diversify to survive.

"With the Investors in People framework we refocused the company, achieved recognition and rebuilt our organisation successfully after downsizing."

Steve Wright, CEO



The challenge

Operating in an industry where assessment and training are the essence of the company's offering, Piper Assessment has always paid close attention to the development and learning needs of its own people. However, in 2002 the company was experiencing difficulties due to a recession in the gas installation business. With reduced demand for its services, the company had to make some difficult choices regarding its workforce.

CEO Steve Wright recalls the period, "We had to completely re-evaluate and restructure our business and this resulted in redundancies for a significant number of employees, with just five people including myself remaining."

Naturally, there were concerns about the impact of the redundancies on the remaining employees. "The fear is that morale will suffer when you make such radical changes," says Steve. "I wasn't sure how our people would react and needed a means of finding out the extent to which this had impacted on perceptions of the business."

At this time, the company also decided to diversify into six other assessment areas including oil installation and servicing, and building regulations. "We needed to fill the gap left by the drop in demand for gas installation assessments," explains Steve. "This meant that the remaining employees needed to be retrained not only in administering the different assessment products that we were planning to offer, but also in delivering the training itself."

Having suffered a blow to its confidence, the company needed a means of restoring its faith in itself. "We had made a business out of providing independent assessment and training, we therefore fully appreciated the value that outside help can bring," says Steve. "I felt sure that Investors in People would confirm that we were running an efficient operation and also felt that accreditation would be valued by prospective new customers. Importantly, attaining the Standard would serve to reassure our people that we were operating in line with best practice."

The strategy

Initially Steve agreed to a mock Investors in People assessment to gain an understanding of any improvements that were needed in the business. As part of this, a sample survey of employees was conducted. "It was very interesting to get a snapshot of people's perceptions, morale and motivation," remembers Steve

As part of the complete assessment a full employee survey was conducted. Steve was pleasantly surprised by the results,

"People told us what they thought of the business and this was recorded in a series of quotes. These confirmed that morale was in fact much higher than I had anticipated and also reassured me that the decision to diversify and change the direction of the business had been the right one for us. This information came at a time that was crucial for the company," says Steve.

The results

Since changing the company's focus and gaining the Standard, Piper Assessment has brought on additional employees and has now surpassed its previous staffing levels. "We've achieved a second accreditation with Investors in People, having gained the Standard for the first time in 2003," says Steve. "The assessment phase was straightforward for our business, because we already had many of the required structures in place. However, we have learned some valuable insights about our people along the way and this has made us stronger.

"It's clear to us that our entire asset is people based, we've brought on new people and our workforce now includes ten employees. Investors in People has given us renewed confidence in our own abilities and that's a definite plus in my view. This confidence has been the driving force in our own recovery, enabling us to steer through a difficult trading period and to build a more robust business."

By focusing on good communications, the company has achieved a good sense of belonging among its people and this has been invaluable to the morale of the workforce. Piper Assessment's customers would appear to agree. "Our customers keep coming back to us because our culture is relaxed and open. This is inspired by the Standard's ethos," says Steve. "Our people see the benefit and our staff turnover is low as a result, with only the occasional departure which is usually due to an individual's dislike for an office environment."

