



Future leaders learn to know – and trust – IBM

More than 50 ambitious people working within the public sector have already participated in a leadership programme run by IBM, creating a community across central and local government with strong connections to the company and a highly influential network of pro-IBM contacts.

The Top Talent Programme, which includes workshops, one-on-one coaching and a team project, is proving to be extremely valuable in building a proper understanding of what IBM actually does amongst an important target audience.

It also creates enduring relationships – one of which has already led to a one million dollar deal – and, according to Programme Leader and Organiser Steve Cliff,

Business Development Executive for the Public Sector within S&D, the programme could easily be replicated across other parts of IBM.

Steve set up the programme a couple of years ago with the Society of IT Managers (SOCITM), which covers people working in communications and IT within the public sector and major charities, and he has been delighted with the ‘snowball’ effect on IBM’s reputation.

A better return

The initial trigger for Top Talent was Steve’s involvement in a trade show about two and a half years ago. As Sales Manager within the Public Sector, it dawned on him that IBM was not getting the returns it hoped for – in terms of relationship-building with clients – through its investment in the show.

He considered several options and then decided to design a leadership development course for public sector professionals working on transformation projects. This would include time with IBM executives, a two-day leadership workshop, links to mentors and buddies, a trip to the Smarter Cities Lab in Dublin and a graduation ceremony. The six-month format is based on similar internal leadership development courses for IBMers and includes several sessions at IBM locations.

SOCITM generally handles the vetting and recruitment of candidates, who must have an executive sponsor, and Steve also checks likely participants with his Public Sector Sales colleagues. As word spreads about the programme’s success, Steve is being approached more and more by IBMers keen to nominate their own contacts for the course.

Changing perceptions

“One of the most striking achievements of the programme is being able to turn around people’s perceptions of IBM,” says Steve. “Many people still see us as a big hardware manufacturer – so they are amazed to hear about our Smarter Planet solutions, our initiatives with Cloud and Analytics and to see our fantastic R&D facilities in Dublin.”

“Interestingly, we had someone on the course last year who had fallen out with IBM over a software licence renewal, and his opinion of us was not good. He changed his mind completely during his time with us, and inspired other participants – now I would count him as a close friend.”

Course participants are being fast tracked in their careers, thereby establishing a UKI-wide network of senior contacts that know each other, know IBM and – importantly – trust IBM. It’s therefore more likely that when seeking a technology partner for their next project, they will include IBM.

Steve points out: “The relatively low investment in this programme is paying IBM back in dividends already, and I see no reason why other parts of IBM shouldn’t run similar courses. If you want to change your client’s perception of IBM over the next couple of years, and create long-lasting meaningful relationships, I can think of no better way of doing it.”

National collaboration

During 2013, two Top Talent courses ran – one in Scotland for 20 people, and another for 15 people across the rest of the UK. Participants completed a personal project connected to their own council or organisation, but this year there will be a group project, designed to pool the talents and aspirations of people likely to become national leaders. This assignment will bring together professionals from environment agencies, health care bodies and city councils, and will have national proportions and significance.

“There are clear business returns for this programme, although they may be in the longer term,” agrees Steve. “But on top of that, it’s an excellent way to get to know future leaders within DWP, HMRC and other central government departments, as well as local authorities and national charities. Participants rate the content of the programme highly, but are equally enthusiastic about the calibre of IBMers. I have no doubt that people who have been on this course would welcome me into their meetings – and those connections are invaluable.”



Steve Cliff

Business Development Executive

What they said ...

“ The programme was inspirational ”

“ The programme has given me a completely different insight into IBM, the services it provides and the expertise within the organisation ”

“ I now see IBM as a forward-thinking, agile company that sees opportunities in Big Data that I hadn’t – it’s an eye-opener ”

“ Collaboration between public and private sectors promotes true partnership rather than the customer/supplier approach ”