



Stephen Citron of informatology, presents the award to Barry Hopley and Jason Stevens

Barry Hopley, head of L&D at NSL entered this year's award under the Best Training Partnership programme and opted in to the new Peer Award at the same time. His entry was for an innovative programme for first line managers that used the metaphor of gardening and growing as the lynchpin of the project.

Following the NSL liP review it was identified that many first line managers were not entirely fulfilling their leadership responsibilities. This was impacting on frontline colleagues, with many unable to explain how their direct managers were effective in leading, managing and developing them. This combined with a labour review that showed poor retention in the first 12 weeks of employment clearly indicated that frontline managers needed further development. "NSL like many organisation has detailed people processes, but it was becoming clear that our frontline managers didn't seem to understand the purpose of the processes," Hopley told *TJ*. "Often people will do what they 'want' to do or what they think they'll be reported on, but don't fully appreciate the impact of their 'inaction' or 'apathy' in relation to people processes."

Hopley was familiar with the work of Jason Stevens director of Ican Development Limited. The 'Ican grow people programme' is built around the concept of gardening, with deep metaphors used to engage people in the

learning experience. Placing the learning experience into a third party perspective allows managers to be very critical of their skills and approaches. Analysing the skills and approaches required for a garden to grow successfully makes the learning experience fun and more importantly easily retained. Learners were able to see the importance of their actions in a powerful way; plants thrive or die as a result of the gardeners' actions or inaction.

Hopley selected five of the programme metaphors. Culture and Climate focused on creating the right atmosphere and conditions. Plant Personalities helped with understanding what colleagues needed and desired to bloom. Selecting and Recruiting for Success was about getting the right seeds. Induction focuses on the importance of the induction greenhouse in giving people a perfect start and the final module was Performance Management with an emphasis on growth targets through supporting the plants development, taking cuttings and dead heading.

In June 2009 Stevens ran a three-day train the trainer course for selected members of Hopley's team. The first day was spent at a local garden centre where Stevens encouraged them to walk around and immerse themselves in plants and gardening. "By wandering about the garden centre they were able to fully understand the idea of the

programme," explained Stevens. "It encouraged them to think of different ways in which they could facilitate the metaphor. For example watering is communication and by talking about different methods of watering and their pros and cons the team quickly saw how effective the learning experience was."

Between July and September the programme was given an initial trial and review. November saw a full organisational roll out. While a full employee engagement survey was carried out in September.

Results

The quality of the people processes have increased in all areas, particularly around recruitment, performance management and induction, this coupled with other improvements has resulted in a drop in labour turnover and increased competency within the first 12 weeks.

The employee engagement survey completed just a month ago, with an 83 per cent return rate, showed the three questions with the highest agreement rating, in excess of 75 per cent were:

- I have a clear idea of what is expected of me.
- When I started in my job I was given all the training and information I needed.
- The training I receive is relevant to my role.

The staff engagement index is at a high of 70 per cent.