



Maison Steffen is a family-owned butcher's enterprise employing 25 people – 18 men and seven women. All employees have long-term contracts. Quality and customer satisfaction is a priority. A serious financial investment has been made in order to achieve the highest possible standards.

Improving health and wellbeing

The employees feel that they are part of the business as they are brought into the planning and decision making process. Every week staff meet for a briefing and twice a year all staff meet up to discuss a wide variety of work issues. These meetings are open and informal so that staff feel able to make a contribution. Good communication channels are considered to be essential and staff can approach the owner at any time if they are experiencing difficulties.

Good working relationships are important too, and these are maintained by effective conflict management techniques and by encouraging a sense of camaraderie and team spirit. Everyone eats breakfast together, for example. This communal meal is provided by the company and includes healthy options such as freshly squeezed juice.

The employer takes the trouble to accommodate staff needs within the busy work schedule. In cases of extreme work overload, a client's order might be refused to avoid excessive pressure being placed on the staff.

A number of other small but important gestures contribute to the staff feeling valued, for instance providing a laundry service for dirty work clothes.

Continuous upgrading of skills

The company believes that training should be ongoing and that broadening staff skills is a contributory factor to a successful business. The staff skills base is maintained and improved via annual training schemes. This training takes place internally, however, the company has taken part in the LEONARDO project "training as a strategic tool for business development".

Creating better working conditions

Workers are consulted about their working environment and any problems they experience with it. Steps are taken to address the issues brought up by employees and a number of improvements have been made as a result. These include purchase of adjustable tables that can be altered to suit individual needs and trolleys for transporting heavy loads. Another measure brought in to cut down

the risk of muscular-skeletal problems was an overhead crane system for lifting heavy goods. Stairs have been replaced with ramps to make transportation of produce easier. The employer has also purchased personal protective equipment for all staff.

Meeting occupational health and safety obligations

The company meets statutory requirements on OHS and access to relevant services is provided for all workers. When individuals start work they are given an information file on OHS matters relating specifically to their profession.

An external audit is carried out twice a month by a veterinary surgeon. A variety of measures – beyond those required by law – are also implemented. In order to protect the health of employees, smoking is banned in the communal dining area.

The company's efforts on behalf of staff resulted in its being nominated for a Good Practice Award 2000.

The benefits of caring for staff
The company believes that taking preventive action where health is concerned contributes towards prosperity. A happy, healthy workforce is a productive one. Initial financial outlay is more than repaid by long-term benefits such as low absenteeism and high productivity.

Because staff are well looked after and feel valued, turnover is low too. In 2001 four staff members will be given a gold watch to mark ten years of employment with the company.

Guaranteeing customer satisfaction

In a business like this customer satisfaction is of immense importance. Customers are very happy with the service they are getting and appreciate that such great emphasis is placed on high quality, however their satisfaction is never taken for granted. Should a complaint be received, it is taken very seriously and is dealt with immediately. The company believes strongly that it cannot flourish if the needs of its employees and customers are ignored.

Improving health

Although the employees enjoy very good health and absenteeism is low, the company makes a point of looking at ways in which health and well-being can be improved. Like training, maintaining health is an ongoing process and the company cannot afford to be complacent. The company is convinced that a healthy, motivated workforce makes an invaluable contribution to the continued success of the business.

Developing plans for the future

The business has grown enormously since it was set up more than a decade ago. At the start the owner and one partner ran the entire operation, now the company employs 25 people. Lack of space has become a major problem with the expansion of the business, so there are plans to move to a sophisticated, modern and spacious plant as soon as possible.