

LARGE ONLINE RETAILER

Senior Apprenticeship Programme Manager

This large online retailer currently has 50 management and leadership apprentices at level 5 and 60 at level 6. They have a handful at level 3, but historically tended to have more at this level. Previously, level 3 apprentices were used as part of a 'Team Leader Step-Up Pool' for people who were temporarily stepping up to a team leader position and needed support.

THE CHALLENGE

The retailer was finding that school leavers hired into the company were not progressing beyond junior or middle manager positions. This posed a risk to engagement and retention, as employees did not see a longer-term career at the company.

HOW MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP APPRENTICESHIPS ARE USED WITHIN THE ORGANISATION

The retailer uses management and leadership apprenticeships in two ways: to bring in new talent, and to upskill existing employees. Typically, they hire graduate level recruits as area managers. However, if an individual does not have a management-specific degree, they are hired as a level 3 management and leadership apprentice. For the first half of the programme, they learn to be a team leader and then they specialise into an area manager. This has addressed the challenge of school leavers hitting a glass ceiling internally and not progressing beyond junior or middle manager positions. In recent times they have decreased the number of level 3 management and leadership apprenticeship hires due to a broader downsizing push. The retailer also uses management and leadership apprenticeships to upskill internal employees. These are used over multiple levels, typically levels 5, 6 and 7. For level 5 and above, a line manager nominates their direct reports if they think that they would benefit from longer term training based on their performance review.

THE IMPACT OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP APPRENTICESHIPS

For external hires, the retailer has found that management and leadership apprenticeship programmes have brought diversity of both thought and personnel. It has also contributed to a less exclusive application process and encouraged greater social mobility as there is less of an attachment to people with degrees.

“ It brings in fresh talent. The people we bring in are different to graduates... Management have seen you don't have to have a degree to do the job... within 6 weeks, they are leading a team. ”

For existing employees, it is about engagement. The existing standards align well to the retailer's progression routes and, by showing how people can progress and making that process transparent through the levels, people are more likely to stay. It was clear people without management degrees were coming across a 'stumbling block' without the right qualifications to progress in the business, causing many people to leave before they got to area manager level. Offering management and leadership apprenticeships therefore means they are able to retain talent much more at level 3 positions. This is less explicit for levels 5 and above, but there has been anecdotal evidence of people saying they feel valued and that they have a long-term position at the company.

“ People know what the progression route is and people will stay because they can get promoted. They realise there is a way to get to the next level. That career ladder has been a big impact on the business and the way that people see the business, a great PR tool. ”

FUTURE APPRENTICESHIP PLANS

The retailer plans to continue to use management and leadership apprenticeships in the same way – for external hires and internal training. However, they have experienced a dip in their level 3's because their workforce is over capacity, and they have reduced the numbers of external hires.

ONE KEY SKILL FOR FUTURE

“ Good managers have great people skills. Anything you can add to the training to develop people skills. ”