



Continuing education in SMEs A WIN-WIN AGREEMENT

In this final article of a two-part series, we talk about continuing education in SMEs. Two engineers explain how they manage to help their company advance thanks to professional development, despite an often tight budget scenario.

A VALUABLE CONVICTION

Houssem Sfaxi, Eng., general manager of NCL Envirotek, says it right off the bat: He firmly believes in professional training. After working for 11 years at a large company, he now manages an SME with around 20 people.

"I can hold this position today because I have always done continuing education," explains the engineer. You need to grow, stay informed. "Even though some fields do not change a lot, such as geotechnology, there are often new programs, products or tools to discover."

"You need to carefully determine your needs," he continues. As for me, continuing education continues to help me stay informed of innovations and strengthen my knowledge. It reassures me to see that what I am doing is still relevant. I also acquire new tools that improve my judgment, an invaluable asset, for example, when supervising junior engineers."

"Another benefit," he says, "is that the courses and workshops provide me with networking opportunities, which may turn into business opportunities!"

As a manager, Mr. Sfaxi is just as convinced because "you need to improve the staff to improve a company." When he began his duties at NCL Envirotek in early 2015, he set up a technical training course and gave it to all staff in order to standardize the processes of both of the company's offices.

"At SMEs, you have to make do with what you have. To promote continuing education, I issued a policy and a guide for employees. I also restructured the staff, which enabled me to establish an annual budget. We manage to pay all planned job training costs and half of the voluntary training costs.

The employees, and the engineers and geologists among them, appreciate this new policy," adds the manager engineer. In less than two years, all training delays have been resolved and the quality of work has improved, which sets us even more apart. The company is now experiencing strong growth and I hope that I will soon be able to pay all continuing education costs!"

MOTIVATION AND CLEAR OBJECTIVES

For Zayan El Khaled, Jr. Eng., wireless network and infrastructure administrator at DIGICOM Technologies, continuing education is an absolute necessity. "Information technology is changing extremely rapidly," he explains. Every week, every month, new innovations crop up. For that reason, I have an obligation to follow the news every day, mainly on scientific news sites and supplier sites." Because he is responsible for professional development on the Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean regional committee, the junior engineer organizes training courses for his peers and attends several of them, not counting the courses he takes on his own initiative at the university.

Mr. El Khaled also finds encouragement from his employer, an SME with around fifteen people, to take training. "When I joined DIGICOM, I received in-house training on the technologies used and a week of training in Montreal.

"I can also suggest my own training courses," he adds, "but they are considered on a case-by-case basis due to the small size of our team. When my employer agrees, we have to see if the budget is available and find a way to divide up my workload during my absence."

Furthermore, the providers offer discussion workshops

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that are full of lessons. "The objective is not to sell or buy products because sales presentations are not eligible under the Regulation respecting continuing education," explains Mr. El Khaled. These meetings are instead meant to better understand the new technologies that we use. We discuss the technical problems that we may encounter in the workplace; we seek solutions adapted to our needs and talk to experts. This is a winning formula for both providers and us!"

Zayan El Khaled finds that professional development is a real away to make progress. Thanks to the various training courses he has taken, he is now helping to engineer new developments in an effort to provide high-speed wireless Internet to rural areas, as well as participating in the company's management and planning activities.

Mr. El Khaled points out, however, that "engineers at SMEs must be personally motivated because they must find the training courses themselves. I also advise young engineers to set short, medium and long-term career objectives and choose their training courses accordingly. They will need to be motivated, determined and patient, they will also need to continuously acquire knowledge through continuing education...

In this way, just like at large companies, continuing education plays a key role at SMEs. However, engineers must show determination more often, especially when negotiating the budget and the time required. Just like the professionals they are, they must be convinced and convincing, because training may bring added value for them and their organization!"