



LASTING WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH AN EMPLOYEE-ORIENTED CORPORATE CULTURE AND GOOD WORKING CONDITIONS

1. Organisations involved

In Germany, the SThree group is represented by its trading divisions Computer Futures, Huxley Associates, Progressive and Real Staffing.

2. Description of the case

2.1. Introduction

SThree is an international recruitment consultancy with its focus on the pharmaceuticals, engineering, IT, banking, finance and accounting fields. Staffing is a service that deals with the placement of specialists and management personnel in both permanent and project work. The Group comprises more than 60 offices on five continents. With nearly 2,300 employees worldwide, SThree is currently the second largest human resources (HR) consultancy. In Germany, there are currently 370 employees working in 16 offices in seven locations. Topics like corporate culture, job design and training play a prominent role at SThree.

2.2. Aims

The company aims to commit its employees through a positive, employee-oriented corporate culture. An important starting point is the style of leadership, which is based on four pillars:

- **Respect** towards the customers and each other internally. Flat hierarchies and an "open door" mentality define this area.
- **Reward** is based on distribution. Sales is a very transparent business, which means you can be measured by figures. Based on that, each success is tangible. SThree motivates their employees by rewarding outstanding achievements with small incentives, such as an invitation to dinner or corporate short trips.
- **Rapport** is the basis for distribution, and therefore also essential to the values of SThree. Networking is the base for each sales position. Strong relationships are not only important with the customer, but also internally, for sharing "best practice" with each other.
- **Energy** is the motto of SThree, which means to have fun at work and reflect this in daily business. Pick up the phone with a smile, be productive and motivate each other. The right energy helps to achieve it.

2.3. What was done, and how?

Corporate culture

Establishing a positive working environment should be achieved through different measures at SThree. The corporate culture is important. At SThree there is a flat hierarchy, which means an open door culture where managers, trainees and consultants sit side by side on the sales floor and everyone is on first-name terms. This helps to create an easier and more efficient communication. For

SThree it is important that a common corporate culture is established across all locations in Germany. Therefore, an annual conference is organised, and regular internal exchange has a high priority.

New starters and young professionals

Before starting a new job, everyone gets a “New starter information pack”, which aims to make the start for trainees easier by providing, for example, a list of available apartments to rent, as well as other important information such as the location of the nearest family doctor to their office. New employees go through a trainee program - they receive a personal mentor and an individual learning programme. A welfare coach calls the young professionals on a regular basis and asks about their experiences. Issues or experiences that the young employees would not tell their superiors can be entrusted to the welfare coach. Thus SThree can assure the wellbeing of all starters and avoid any miscommunication or disappointment due to false expectations.

Training and further education

Through training the employees learn professional recruitment, sales skills, soft skills and the necessary operational knowledge to succeed in this branch. SThree does not just provide an extensive classroom training programme, but offer blended learning solutions throughout an employee's career. This means, for instance, e-learning, peer learning and on-the-job coaching. The majority of employees started their career as a consultant and worked their way up. This creates a special environment, in that you know your superior was also in your shoes when he or she started out.

The SThree development path covers every step of a consultant's career, from trainee (first 6 months) to on-the-job training and e-learning in the first year. As soon as the managers take their first steps in their new role they receive not only training on the technical side, but also on building their management soft skills. SThree offers a comprehensive programme of training and exchange with their global business leaders. Learning is a core value at SThree.

Besides all of these training measures, consultants will be provided with a working book called “Route to Recruitment Success”. This working book will accompany them on their way to their next promotion, and may well be with them throughout their whole career at SThree. They will need to bring it to meetings with their superior, and fill it with valuable content on the basics of recruitment. Complementary to this working book they will have access to a spreadsheet that will help them, as well as their manager, keep track of their progress, and ensure that the appropriate training is received.

Knowledge exchange

Active exchange with colleagues through national and international incentives is strongly promoted. Employees have the chance to get to know foreign offices through office swaps. Here, colleagues work a short amount of time from another office, which can be in Germany, but also in other countries. Employees have the opportunity to see how work in another office differs from the work in their home office, as well as to experience a different office culture.

Financial protection

The employees receive a company pension scheme.

Lifestyle benefits

Special discounts are offered by “Corporate Benefits“. These benefits contain discounts for many services, discounts for car rentals or a company discount for a fitness centre. Non-operational activities, such as travelling, or doing sports together strengthen the social cohesion and wellbeing of

the employees. Additionally, so-called Family Days are organised on a regular basis in order to involve partners and children in the context of the workplace. An international Christmas party at the headquarters in London is held every year with employees from all over the world meeting for one day to celebrate Christmas together. This occasion also contains a huge charity event with both company-sponsored donations to SOS children's villages and prizes for employees. Also at this event the international company culture is encouraged through a specific seating plan, which places different offices from different countries on one table so as to provide people with the chance for exchange.

Flexible working hours contribute to a good work-life balance, and give employees the chance to react flexibly to any unexpected changes. Core working hours (10 am to 4 pm) ensure that the weekly contractual working time will be respected, as well as day-to-day business needs.

2.4. What was achieved?

The evaluation of the consultants' needs helps to improve satisfaction in the company, which is why STthree conducts internal surveys at regular intervals. Due to high employee satisfaction thus far, STthree was awarded with the quality label "Open Company and Top Company" from *kununu.de* in 2010¹. This seal goes to every company that generates an average score of more than 3.3 points out of 5. These points reflect the satisfaction of (ex-) employees. As well as this award STthree has received others, such as the APSCo award for "The Best Recruitment Company" in 2012, "International Recruitment Awards –most admired company" in 2011 and gained the seal "fair company" from the magazine "Karriere" (career) in 2009.

2.5. Success factors

STthree's main success factor is the combination of training and culture. The mentoring and training programmes help employees to develop themselves. Achievements are rewarded individually and in teams. Furthermore, flat hierarchies, flexible working times, international career opportunities and sharing best practices all over the world help shape the corporate culture at STthree. Every employee has the opportunity to achieve their goals in this employee-oriented corporate culture, and the steady growth of the company confirms this approach.

2.6. Further information

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¹ <http://www.kununu.com/de/all/de/bc/sthree>

2.7. *Transferability*

In principle, all of the approaches mentioned above are transferable. An open corporate culture with flat hierarchies, support for new and young employees, ongoing training, knowledge transfer, financial protection, benefits for performance and flexible working hours are measures that can be established in any business, large or small.

3. References, resources:

- www.sthreecareers.com
- <http://sthreegermany.blogspot.com/>
- <http://www.kununu.com/de/all/de/bc/sthree>
- <https://www.facebook.com/sthreegermany>