

Staying Competitive in a Global Market Through the English Language

Challenge:

Grasping Foreign Legal Matters Through Improved English Skills

Founded in 1910, electronics giant Hitachi, Ltd. currently employs over 44,000 people in its parent company, and the entire group of companies has a total workforce of roughly 340,000 employees worldwide. As a multinational entity, Hitachi must be able to react quickly to legal issues around the world. Today, many contracts and negotiations are performed in English, necessitating lawyers with strong written and spoken, as well as legal skills. Hitachi needed to improve the English skills of their global legal staff in order to compete in the world market.

Solution:

Hitachi decided to make English language education a priority for their employees. And since 1995, they have made the TOEIC test an integral part of their In-House English Proficiency Test System. TOEIC scores are used to help screen candidates for training programs. On-site learning takes place at the Hitachi Institute of Management Development. Employees can tailor their choice of around twenty courses to improve general communication skills, written skills or more goal specific needs. Knowing that time and space are often hurdles to improving English skills, Web-based Training (WBT) options have been made available. WBT also allows for a more personalized learning experience.

In February 2002, Hitachi developed an index of TOEIC scores for employees of all levels to achieve. These targeted goals are used to help motivate employees at all levels. New recruits are required to achieve a score of 500, and improve to 600 at the trainee level. Section Managers need a 650 and executive candidates must score at least 800 points.

Result:

As a result of the TOEIC test and the rest of Hitachi's in-house system, the employee's English proficiency has vastly improved. Employees have been given the freedom to set their own TOEIC targets and stay in control of their own education. This has helped keep them motivated to keep improving their English-language skills. By giving their legal team the English expertise required to operate in the global arena, Hitachi, Ltd. remains a strong international player.