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Training – Trick or Treat?

“Let’s hope they don’t use that qualification here” “If I do my job, I’ll be out of job” and other similar comments would make any self-respecting business owner lay awake at night. But it is happening within our \$20 billion, 3rd largest export business – international education and training. The VET industry has been in the negative spotlight for quite a while now – the main issues being the wholesale sign-up of “anyone” into the Government’s VET FEE-HELP scheme and the related bankruptcy of many government-approved and licenced training organisations. The media chorus has been all about the huge sums of taxpayer dollars given to private colleges who in turn willfully signed-up anyone, most with little hope of completing the course.

But there is another big wrong happening with zero media attention – the hand-out of qualifications with little or no meaning. And “meaning” has two meanings. Firstly, due to the generic nature of many qualifications, there is a lack of meaningful connection to a business or industry. Secondly, and more critical, is the lack of meaning or motive to the individual, the student. As a qualified trainer/assessor, I’ve noticed the overriding motive of most international students is a long stay in Australia, not the learning. Unscrupulous operators hitch onto this motive by providing a tick-the-box service. What makes it even more illogical is that a typical Diploma course will set a student back circa \$14 000. So you’d think there would be a strong desire to find a quality training provider and make the most of the learning opportunity. Some yes – most no, and the entire system is letting it happen.

Australian education and training, at every level has maintained a very high standard but my own anecdotal evidence suggests the drive for privatisation, profits, lack of regulation and an absence of business pushback indicates it is on a downward spiral. Left unchecked this will permanently tarnish our Tertiary/VET qualifications and the entire industry – and when that happens, it will be a long road back. And, of course, the ultimate customer, Australian business, will suffer. As a senior manager in a number of organisations, I’ve interviewed and employed a number of people in various roles. An individual who presented themselves with a Diploma in a field relevant to the business would have an additional quality that may secure them the job – and as an Australian qualification, I’d see no real need to question it. But all I can say now is, business leaders beware; there is a fair chance (and it seems, an increasing chance), a Diploma noted on a resume is just that – a line on a document.

Training is a critical component of any business’ growth strategy but in order to ensure maximum value you need to consider the following:

- ***Do your checks.*** A Diploma may have little meaning. Confirm the applicant’s knowledge. Check out the college’s credentials and the trainer (if possible) – Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) issues media releases when a training provider is de-registered. A college’s high completion rate may not mean quality learning but rather low standards. Quality must be the overriding KPI.
- ***Understand the Qualification.*** Go to www.training.gov.au for details on all approved VET qualifications. Review the topics and the relevance to the role and your business.

- **Customise your Training.** Work with an organisation that has industry experienced trainers and customise your training to suit your business. Most times, the standard generic course has little relevance – customisation links the training directly to your business. At an organisation I was involved in, we approached TAFE for specific training on a discipline to suit our business – no interest. With the help of an external provider, we developed a customised training package which directly linked the core outcomes to our business.
- **Feedback.** Industry groups need to put pressure on governments to ensure that appropriate standards are maintained.

Our largest exports, 1st – Coal, 2nd – Iron Ore and 4th – Tourism, like all successful businesses have their clients’ needs aligned with their product or service. Coal and Iron Ore’s price, availability and quality must meet the needs of their overseas and local clients. Similarly, with Australian Tourism, our beautiful country provides a quality experience for our overseas visitors – that is why they come. Our 3rd largest, Education, sadly, I believe the correct alignment is lost and therefore the growing concern is that the quality of education is trending down. Government and industry needs to act before it becomes an irreversible downward trend.

Joe Napoli, Principal Consultant, NLogic Management Services