

# We work hard to remove the fear factor from learning

## Occupational Training Institute's general manager on the challenges facing L& D, and the value of teaching defensive driving

Learning and development is considered the most important talent-related challenge faced by organisations in the Middle East, according to Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends report. Despite this, only 37 per cent of organisations believe they have the necessary tools and training programmes to meet this human capital challenge. People Management spoke to Steven Hickey, general manager at the Occupational Training Institute (OTI) in Oman, about the challenges of training a multicultural workforce and how practical courses such as defensive driving can be just as important as leadership training.

### **What specific challenges do employers face when training employees in the Middle East?**

We have to adapt our concept to our clients' requirements such as training in various languages, and focusing more on practical sessions to ensure the delegates understand the benefits of the course.

The varying backgrounds of those requiring training can pose a challenge. We must consider that some course attendees may have different educational backgrounds to others. The key is to give confidence to the delegate and make sure he or she understands that when they leave the training centre, they have come away with the benefits of the course. We also work hard to remove the fear factor and assure people that if they fail the course they won't lose their job.

### **You also teach practical skills such as languages and defensive driving – why?**

OTI and Qatar International Safety Centre (QISC) both have defensive driving departments offering a number of courses on- and off-road. In the Middle East we have expats from a number of countries, who have different ways of driving. It is our and our clients' responsibility to teach them the correct way to drive and ensure the welfare of their staff.

A recent survey in the Emirates by YouGov revealed that nine per cent of drivers said 'signalling was a sign of weakness'. To address such attitudes, defensive driving trainers aim to go behind the practical techniques to influence the thinking behind driving.

Our trainers address the fundamental aspects of driving by relating driving to normal everyday behaviour, such as courtesy, politeness and respect for others. For some reason, this attitude is not always carried through on the road.

### **What dangers do workers who drive in the region face on the roads?**

There is work to be done in building awareness and understanding of the concept of 'defensive driving'. For example, never assume a driver approaching from a road to your right will stop, even if there is a stop sign. Defensive driving teaches drivers to expect and prepare for any possible hazards, both environmental and those caused by human error.

Failing to indicate before changing lanes is also a big issue here. We teach students to be aware of the drivers around them, to anticipate any sudden lane changes and how it could impact their vehicle either from the front or behind. Again, it is essential to approach slip roads with this in mind, and adjust speed and position accordingly. The need to adopt a 'what can go wrong' approach while driving is an important tool in maintaining road safety, especially for those who have jobs as drivers, spending many hours on the road.