

Islington Council – IT Fitness Programme for the Board

Background

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Most of the many ‘e’-government initiatives to encourage the use of technology have been outwardly focused to get councils to deliver their services and interact electronically with the public. On an individual level there has been little training to ensure that IT especially electronic communications are being used effectively internally.

Islington Council’s Board Directors decided something had to be done following their implementation of a new e-HR system and a move toward smart (flexible) working practices. Additionally a review of the way the Board used technology by Mesmo revealed that on average Directors were spending up to 27% of their day dealing with their inboxes.

The challenge – getting the board on board

The initial challenge established by HR Manager Maria King and her fellow Directors was for the ‘Executive Lifestyle IT Fitness Programme’ to:

- enhance the Board’s use and management of IT at an individual level;
- enable them to lead by example;
- develop ways of working more efficiently and productively with their colleagues and support staff.

“The coaching led to more effective working, saved us time and improved our competency with unfamiliar applications.”

Mesmo initially worked with the main Board Directors to review their use of technology and benchmarked their differing levels of ‘fitness’. This covered how they worked with their support staff, how they handled their inbox and how they prepared their reports and presentations. Each of them kept a work diary for a week. “We were surprised at the amount of unproductive time spent dealing with unnecessary emails, the training has helped us focus on what is important” commented Kevin O’Leary, Director of Environment and Regeneration for Islington Council.

“The training has increased our appetite and awareness of IT.”

“This programme was not about teaching the Directors to use IT – it was more like high-level sports coaching to fine tune their use of technology to help them and their teams be more productive. Many of them, especially the younger board members, are very IT savvy but they were not always using the technology appropriately. For example, they were spending too much time on things they should have been delegating, eg handling email and preparing presentations. There was also a huge ‘cc’ culture creating vast amount of unnecessary email” said Monica Seeley, Founder of Mesmo.

With Mesmo's coaching we now use technology better and work smarter when preparing presentations or working out of the office on our PDAs."

"We chose Monica because she understands the pressures of senior executives in local government and knows that technology is only part of the solution. She has shown us the key shortcuts and enabled us to use electronic communications more productively across the board whether we are in the office or out in the field."

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The solution

Mesmo initially launched a coaching programme for all the main Board Directors, and some Assistant Directors – this is now percolating down through workshops to employees throughout the Council.

Individual coaching not only enhanced the use of Outlook and associated Office software by showing senior staff how to save time but also how to be more effective in their use of technology when working with their team. It also covered working effectively while mobile or working from home.

Kevin O'Leary said "The coaching led to more effective working, saved us time and improved our competency with unfamiliar applications."

The results

"This has brought us all to a level playing field. Many of us are high-level specialists who are not IT experts", commented Andy Jennings, Deputy Chief Executive; "The training has increased our appetite and awareness of IT. Mesmo is now helping to instigate a special programme of *ad hoc* away days to see and discuss how other public and private organisations are using technology in interesting ways. This is proving to be a stimulating and valuable source of new ideas. It works because of Monica Seeley's connections and the fact that Mesmo is an independent and vendor-neutral organisation – they have no axe to grind."

"With Mesmo's coaching we now use technology better and work smarter when preparing presentations or working out of the office on our PDAs" concludes Kevin O'Leary.

The Executive Lifestyle Fitness Programme is being extended to other Assistant Directors and offered as workshops to other members of the organisation. Ken Simpson who is managing the workshops says "It's a very popular course – lots of people have found it really useful and they have spread the word. Informal feedback already indicates that that people are making significant time savings and feeling much more effective about their use of email."

Why Mesmo/Monica Seeley?

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