



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

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Peter Ayliffe, CEO VISA Europe

Investors in People & Finance

Going for Gold with Peter Ayliffe CEO and President of VISA Europe, who are not only sponsoring the 2012 Olympics, investing in sporting excellence, but are also committed to investing in their people – helping demonstrate their commitment to excellence for their employees and partners.

Almost all of us carry Visa cards and when we use them we are aware of the power of the technology and systems which drives them. But behind the card, the chip and the pin it still all boils down to people.

Amongst these, perhaps, the key person at Visa Europe is Peter Ayliffe, the company's highly successful chief executive officer who is also a non-Executive Director of Investors in People UK.

Commitment and enthusiasm sparkle off Peter's personality – it's easy to see why he would be an inspirational figure. And speaking about his responsibilities as chief executive he is quite clear about the key requirement. “You have to be passionate about the business,” he says. “That is the most important thing of all.”

As an economist by background Peter's whole career has been spent in the banking industry. Starting with the National Westminster Bank he moved on to Lloyds TSB where he progressed to become a Main Group Board Director. He joined Visa Europe as President and CEO in the spring of 2006.

Given the focus on the financial services industry at the moment Peter is happy to point out that Visa Europe has been less affected by the current financial crisis than others. Instead it acts primarily as a vast pan-European payment system facilitator providing the infrastructure, leadership at the collective market level and value at the individual customer level for its 4,600 member banks operating across 36 European markets.



“... organisations that choose to enter the IIP process and are successful in gaining accreditation generate higher gross profits than would a randomly-selected organisation.”

Institute for Employment Studies - 2008

Visa Europe has recently become independent of Visa Inc., the USA based parent and it now has an exclusive, irrevocable and perpetual license for the European continent. That is important because the more that Visa Europe can tailor its services to its European customer-base the better its customer relations will be. As a dedicated European payment system Visa Europe is able to respond fast and flexibly to the specific market needs of European banks and their customers (whether cardholders or retailers) and it is committed to meet the European Commission's objective to create a true internal market for payments. "The fact that we are purely focused on Europe makes that job a lot easier," says Peter.

'Appetite for Change' ----

Visa's long term goal is to 'displace cash' but to do that requires a combination of innovative technology led products and services and the ability to lead its members and the public in the right direction. Meanwhile, its competitive edge over its rivals is based on being able to provide a more efficient, secure, faster and value adding payment system than anything else on offer.

To achieve this it is vital that the whole Visa Europe organisation stays focused and motivated. "We are trying to lead change in our market and that needs people who are deeply committed to the process," he says. "Fortunately, I'm tremendously impressed by the passion we have among our people. There is an enormous appetite and desire for change."

Sustaining and constantly stimulating that level of appetite and passion has become a key management priority. And given that the company has a network of regional offices strung out across the major European capitals (plus major processing centres across southern England) the challenge of communicating to everyone is formidable and remorseless.

"I use the restaurants in the main offices in London, Basingstoke and elsewhere to bring people together to report on what the business is doing. We also have live link-ups with all the Regional offices. Fortunately, although we are scattered, we are still small enough in numbers to be able to do that. It really helps when you are trying to motivate people and convey that passion about the business."

Equally important though is the way that Visa Europe's people communicate with its customers. "In my view retaining and deepening relationships with your customers is probably the most important part of any business and we need our people to be motivated to do that. I feel strongly that a key distinguishing factor between successful businesses and others is the performance of the people at the interface – in our case that means with customers, members, retailers and other stakeholders. Financial services is a real relationship business and we interface at quite a senior level with other organisations so it is vital that we have the right skills and capabilities in place to do that. Where we have those right people - where they are well trained and bring passion to the job - then we do really well in creating the positive experiences which are critical for success."

The power of the Investors in People 'Framework' ---

Talk about skills and capabilities soon brings Peter on to Investors in People and the benefits it delivers. He admits that when he first came across the Standard he was running a region of Lloyds TSB and was, initially, a sceptic. "I felt that I was too busy and had too much to do to get involved in it." However, a colleague was so enthusiastic that he felt he had to give the case for Investors in People a proper hearing. He clicked with Investors in People when he realised that it provided a framework to ensure that the organisation was actually doing what it was committed to doing in any case (not least in terms of the review process which, as Peter points out, is so often forgotten).

He became such a supporter that he is now convinced that every organisation – regardless of how large or sophisticated it is – will benefit from Investors in People. This led to him join the board of Investors in People in 2003 and he continued in that role when he joined Visa Europe (where he is now building on a pre-existing programme called Peak Performance Organisation, to take Visa Europe towards Investors in People recognition).

In line with the principles of Investors in People Peter is firmly convinced of the need to recruit the right people, give them the skills and responsibility and then empower them to get on with it. "For example, there is no way we can run the French business from here in Paddington," he says. "But if you say to people 'You're responsible, you're accountable' and then give them the training and the freedom to operate then they will deliver. It means that that everyone in the organisation can make a big difference."

Reflecting, finally, on the changes that have hit the financial services sector since the summer 2007 Peter thinks that there will be a big swing back to trusted brands with the emphasis on security rather than gimmickry. Another good argument, in fact, for Investors in People.

How does Investors in People equate to a competitive advantage?

For many companies a crucial and indispensable benefit of working with Investors in People is that it encourages them to evaluate their practices effectively to ensure they are getting the right return on investment.

Investors in People provide a framework to ensure that your people have the right knowledge, skills and motivation to work efficiently. It ensures development of strategies to improve the performance of your organisation and helps realise objectives through the management and development of your people.

Where to next:

Further information on how Investors in People works within the retail sector can be found via:

- Speak to Katherine Cottrell, or Russell Cannon here today, or via email to Katherinec@iipuk.co.uk or Russellc@iipuk.co.uk
- Contacting the Investors in People Customer Service Line to find your local Investors in People Centre on **020 7467 1946** or information@iipuk.co.uk
- Investors in People Interactive tool. A flexible and free online business diagnostic tool with templates, reports and signposting which can be found at www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/interactive
- The Investors in People website www.investorsinpeople.co.uk is a fantastic tool for general information, case studies, research and online resources to help you begin your Investors in People journey.