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Exiting Performance Appraisal: Glen Clifford, Contracted Intercultural Communication, Customer Service, and Soft Skills Trainer

Oxagile is a Belarusian information technology outsourcing company employing more than 500 people throughout Eastern Europe and the U.S.A. Locally in Minsk, Oxagile employs on-site and remote specialists that work in a wide range of research, development and service areas. Many I.T experts work in the areas of on-demand video/entertainment services (for some of America's biggest broadcasters), A.I security data processing, and healthware/wellness applications. With these types of global business interests, Oxagile is constantly online, communicating with clients and developers in North America, Asia, the Middle East, and India, using English as the primary language of communication.

To develop and strengthen effective communication, Oxagile usually employs three fulltime non-native General English Trainers, all graduates from Minsk State Linguistic University. However, when requirements emerge, Oxagile also employs native English speaking trainers. In this capacity, Glen worked with Oxagile as a specialist Intercultural Communication and Soft Skills Trainer for 12 months, starting March 2021, and finishing February 2022.

Glen's mandate, which he far exceeded, was to introduce, train and develop intermediate oral/aural I.C and soft skills English for effectively and politely:

- (1) Clarifying concepts, aims, and ideals
- (2) Explaining processes and steps, and
- (3) Reporting progress and obstacles.

Glen began working with three different groups, that each attended training twice a week. Each group consisted of four trainees. Due to the global pandemic and migration issues in Western Europe, by February 2022 trainee numbers had lessened, making groups difficult to organize and maintain. Consequently, Oxagile management decided to postpone training for the foreseeable future.

The main method, characteristic and quality of Glen's oral/aural training is a specialisation in modern 'Guided Discussion Group Work'. Initially, trainee groups consider and discuss topics/situations/questions requiring polite functional English (also classified as intermediate soft skills) for explaining, reiterating, agreeing, disagreeing, and interjecting. In addition, the carefully arranged topic questions encourage trainees to eventually practice and develop advanced soft skills, such as active listening, storytelling, and expressing empathy, diplomacy, and adaptiveness. Despite being guided, moderative and corrective, this oral/aural training begins to feel very 'natural', as trainees are totally immersed into the language environment. A real and safe interpersonal training environment is established, far superior to simulative training, where regular setup procedures greatly reduce natural spontaneity.

During guided discussion, there are no whiteboards, projected presentations, or similar technologies that could distract from this pure oral/aural environment. In terms of training materials, Glen has authored, produced and customised 36 four-page handouts, being pertinent topics that evoke and elicit required oral/aural soft skill responses, also being learning outcomes. For every topic handout, there are questions/prompts, evocative statements, and exercises in changing informal utterances to formal/professional statements. These handouts have been bound together, amounting to a 145 page A4 sized PDF or printed training companion.

In the past five months (of 12 at Oxagile), Glen has exceeded his initial mandate by providing customised training content/topics directly connected to Oxagile's core business interests. This content has included critical guided discussions about 'streaming video services', 'developing software interfaces for senior citizens', and other topics. Glen also continues to develop as a specialised trainer, researching 'Global I.T Outsourcing' and 'Agile Project Management'. Globally, the demand for this training has increased, as various smaller nations now aspire to become regional hubs for information technology services.

The training developed and delivered by Glen in the past 12 months has had a progressive quality, continuously driving trainees onward in terms of E.S.L oral/aural soft skills development. The end result being that many of these Oxagile specialists can now more confidently speak spontaneous functional English for extended periods of time, encompassing more natural interaction when there is a need for rapport building, negotiation and other advanced soft skills.



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