Fiege Logistics pursues new path with Employment Agency to secure skilled professionals

Refugees employed in Ibbenbüren

For the Greven-based logistics company, Fiege, it proved to be a new challenge: Multiple vacancies at the warehouse were to be filled with refugees, with support from the Employment Agency Rheine. Collectively, employment agency and company experts crafted a concept that enables refugees to find employment faster, and as a result be integrated into the workforce more quickly. The idea for this cooperation came from Jens Fiege, member of Fiege’s Executive Board and Torsten Withake, managing director of the regional office of North Rhine-Westphalia’s unemployment insurance for the German Federal Employment Agency, during a round table that covered the issue of how to secure skilled professionals.

Since early August, four refugees from Lebanon and Pakistan have been working at the Ibbenbüren warehouse as order pickers. These engagements indicate a new path for Fiege in securing skilled professionals for its operations. “Many aspects represented new territory for us”, says Martina Schlottbom, head of HR at Fiege. “This was also the very reason why we approached the Employment Agency in Rheine directly.” In a joint effort and throughout many meetings, the partners extensively worked on creating structures and process flows that assist people who had been forced to flee their county with taking up employment. This proved particularly important in relation to formal process flows which must be taken into consideration when employing refugees. “Certain legal requirements must be looked into prior to any employment. For example, the foreigners’ registration office must issue a work permit for the new employees”, explained Anke Hermeling, Employer Service team manager at the Employment Agency in Rheine. “This is where we structured the cooperation amongst the offices involved, thereby creating short distances. We are now in a position to support businesses with the application process and formalities much faster.”

Other challenges only presented themselves in the course of the application and employment process. “For many refugees, for example, the process of an interview as is customary in Germany, is unheard of”, says Martina Schlottbom. “In some cases, it is custom in the home countries of some applicants that they just stand by the roadside and are employed on the spot - for example as a handyman, or helper. To hold an interview with people wearing suits when applying for a warehouse job was rather strange for some of the refugees.” It was therefore decided to invite eligible candidates to a Job Shadow Day, explained Anke Hermeling. “In consultation with Corinne Kuhlmeier, the head of PR of the Fashion BU at Fiege, we selected around ten interested refugees and prepared them for a Job Shadow Day. Once on location, the candidates were able to get a good idea of what to expect. The getting-to-know-each-other part ultimately broke the ice”, so her summary.

This also paved the way for their integration into the workforce, so the conviction of Martina Schlottbom - leading to the company’s further pursuit of more plans already. Jointly with the Employer Service of the Employment Agency for Rheine, refugees are to obtain qualifications in future and be prepared for a career in logistics. “The contact with business schools in Ibbenbüren is to give young refugees the opportunity to acquire school leaving qualifications”, says Anke Hermeling, explaining the concept like this: “During a year of preparation, the youths are to attend school while at the same time undergoing a traineeship at the company on three days of the week.” The aim of the partners is to acquaint young refugees intensively with the concept of vocational training. For Martina Schlottbom and Corinna Kuhlmeier, the strong commitment on behalf of the logistics provider is best explained as follows: “We consider young people a major opportunity to cover our future demand for skilled professionals.”

Following a first good experience, the employment process for refugees developed together with the Employment Agency Rheine is to be applied to other Fiege locations in the future. “Our 160 subsidiaries have a great demand for skilled professionals. Here, too, we are committed to the employment of displaced persons in our company. Other companies can refer to the concept as a Best Practice”, so the conclusion of Anke Hermeling.

**Zu Fiege:** Die Fiege Gruppe mit Stammsitz in Greven, Westfalen, zählt zu den führenden Logistikanbietern in Europa. Ihre Kompetenz besteht insbesondere in der Entwicklung und Realisierung integrierter, ganzheitlicher Logistiksysteme. Sie gilt als Pionier der Kontraktlogistik. Die Gruppe erwirtschaftete 2015 mit 10.500 Mitarbeitern weltweit einen Umsatz von 1,4 Milliarden Euro. 160 Standorte und Kooperationen in 15 Ländern bilden ein engmaschiges logistisches Netzwerk. 2,7 Millionen Quadratmeter Lager- und Logistikflächen sprechen für die Leistungsfähigkeit des Unternehmens.

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