

## **EMPLOYMENT IN THE OPEN MARKET**

**Eygenia Lianou, Responsible for the Total Quality Management Dept. of COCO-MAT, Natural Sleep Products, Hellas**

Instead of talking theoretically, I would like to talk about my personal experience.

When I was a child my parents told me that I was not different from the others in any way.

So, I studied French literature at the University of Athens and at the same time I studied computer science.

After I have finished my studies I believed that it was easy to conquer the whole world.

I applied for a job in many companies. They said “no” because of my disability.

When I started working in COCO-MAT I felt very comfortable as I was regarded as an equal member of COCO-MAT’s family.

The expression “COCO-MAT’s family” is real. We use nicknames to talk to each other, we travel together, we do sports, we have fun.

From the beginning, COCO-MAT’s leadership gave me many responsibilities. After hard work and strong willing, I became head of TQM Department.

Since then I didn’t know anything about TQM. When they told me what TQM is I was really impressed. I was especially interested in the first part, the word TOTAL.

I felt that it was hard to persuade a driver for example to follow specific processes.

We attended internal seminars every Monday and Wednesday afternoon and Saturday morning at 6 o’ clock.

In the beginning we had low participation so we tried to find measures in order to motivate people.

We organized ceremonies and awards and we finally obtained our target.

And we are proud of it.

We are proud because everyone, disabled people, foreigners, people with low educational level can equally participate in all processes.

We in COCO-MAT believe in people.

COCO-MAT offers chances to everyone.

It is obvious that employees are the biggest investment for COCO-MAT. That is why COCO-MAT does not hire employees for limited time, but looks for permanent positions. It is worth noting that the number of employees has increased tremendously from 15 to 202 persons.

COCO-MAT has achieved an exceptional and honoring novelty: more than 70% of its employees are refugees from the ex Soviet Union and Turkey, a fact that demonstrates the company’s interest in special social groups. This interest is also expressed by the recruitment of “special skilled” people, people from families with many children and people who face racial, religious and ethnic discrimination. In our company we have 13 nationalities and 9 religions.

Following employees’ requests, teachers are recruited, for the purpose of teaching the Greek language, twice a week, to those employees that are not fluent Greek speakers.

Moreover, COCO-MAT decided to rebuild its central building in order to be totally accessible to special-skilled people.

It is also important that COCO-MAT pays attention to the health of its employees through the assistance of a pathologist who periodically measures the blood pressure and heartbeats of the workforce. Figs, nuts, fruits of the season and freshly squeezed orange juice are offered to COCO-MAT employees every morning.

All employees are encouraged to take action and initiate projects. Employee involvement in the decision making process is a focal point for the smooth operation of the company. Through their extensive participation in the decision making process, the employees can express their views and problems, take initiatives and suggest any solutions regarding the improvement of the quality of the company’s products and services, the improvement of the production procedures and the working

conditions. The head of TQM has special papers, where every employee can write down his or her proposals and ideas.

More than 200 ideas and suggestions were discussed during the year 2001. 36 of them were adopted for implementation. Some of them were: a) Implementation of BAR-CODE system b) Electronic newspaper (every two months) c) Wooden boxes for the transportation of furniture d) Three trips abroad for the head of the marketing department in order to find innovative ideas e) Modification of the place of mattress production.

Moreover, the company adapted the institution of “morning coffee” in order to be more accessible and to meet better employees’ expectations. It is a very important innovative idea, which has been implemented in COCO-MAT since September 2001. Every morning, after starting their duty, all employees, instead of working, gather in the workspace for 15-20 minutes, to meet one another and discuss football or any other social topic, the problems of the previous day and plan the timetable for the next day. This institution satisfied all the employees and contributes not only to solving operating problems but also in ameliorating communication problems between managers and employees.

That is what social contribution means for me. I hope that other companies will imitate this example.