

The benefits of learning an additional language

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Language affects the daily lives of everyone around the world. It helps express our feelings and desires, and ensures that we are able to communicate with those around us. The importance of communication is often overlooked. In order to travel the world, whether for business or pleasure, a willingness to adapt to new cultures and ways of life is essential. This adaptability includes being ready to communicate with new people in various languages. Being unable to communicate in a country makes it extremely difficult to adapt and get along with those you meet.

Additionally, the ability to communicate in multiple languages is becoming more important in the increasingly integrated global business community. No matter what career you choose, if you've learned a second language, you'll have a real advantage. Communicating directly with new clients and companies in their native language is one of the first steps to founding a lasting, stable international business relationship. Being able to do this automatically puts any multilingual person miles ahead of his or her peers in the competition for jobs and high-prestige positions. Learning to communicate fluently in multiple languages provides additional job security and advancement opportunities in uncertain economic times.

As a result we must foster an environment that promotes multilingual learning. Strong language skills are an asset that will promote a lifetime of effective communication. Those companies that providing foreign language training for employees find that this brings an abundance of benefits for both the company and its employees. Here are just a few of the reasons any company should promote language training:

- Customer engagement, satisfaction and retention
 - For those employees who master a language to a high level, the ability to communicate with new and potential overseas customers provides significant competitive advantages. From marketing to customer support, languages can present new business opportunities, increase sales and improve retention of existing customers. For those employees starting to grasp the basics of a new language, customers and international colleagues will be grateful for, and often pleasantly surprised at, their newfound skills.
- Employee engagement, satisfaction and retention
 - Language training for your staff is not only directly beneficial to your organisation, but also acts as an excellent employee benefit. Language training enables staff to gain a new skill and to develop both personally in building confidence and broadening social skills, as well as professionally in opening doors. Group language courses have the added benefit of team building, which helps to improve internal communication, morale and productivity.
- Learning a foreign language can increase creativity amongst your workforce.
- Employees who learn a language will also develop an understanding of foreign culture, politics and business practices, and so become far more sensitive to cultural norms when travelling to different countries.
- Learning another language helps to improve employees' general language skills by encouraging students to think about aspects of language such as grammatical construction, and so leads to a better grasp of the language/s they speak.
- The whole experience will make employees feel valued and give them a sense of achievement.

Foreign language training has become so important in the business environment that many experts see it as a major trend for both large international businesses and smaller companies. For example, in 2009, a major maker of foreign language training software attributed only a small percentage of their sales to Fortune 1000 companies. Today, by contrast, the company is seeing exponential growth in sales to the same Fortune 1000 companies.

It has also become clear that English isn't the only language that companies are encouraging their employees to pursue. With the rapid growth of international business, companies are offering language training in isiZulu, French, Mandarin, Portuguese and Spanish. We've outlined a few reasons that these are the most popular languages within the business world:

Learning IsiZulu helps to improve your communication with fellow South Africans. Many people express their desire for greater cultural awareness and integration within the social fabric of South Africa, and see themselves as being actively involved in the social renewal of our country. Speaking IsiZulu, even at a beginner level, can lead to increased social and even business opportunities as this is the most widely spoken language in South Africa and is commonly used as a lingua franca.

In addition to the lure of 'Paris in the spring' and French 'cuisine', the increasing business opportunities between South Africa and Francophone African countries provide considerable reason for individuals and corporate clients to learn or improve their French. There is no doubt that speaking French broadens opportunities in the areas of travel, work and study.

It should come as no surprise that Mandarin is the most commonly spoken language in the world, with approximately one billion mother-tongue speakers – 14% of the world's population. Given China's rise as a world power and its role in the world economy, business ties between China and South Africa are developing rapidly. An understanding of Mandarin has therefore become a key to commercial ventures based in China.

Following the growing need to improve contact with Mozambique and Angola, Portuguese is fast becoming an essential tool in the Southern African region. As a result, many people are now learning Portuguese for business reasons. As South Africa increases its trade and cultural contacts with Brazil, Angola and Mozambique, where Portuguese is an official language, the demand for people with a working knowledge of Portuguese has grown exponentially.

Spanish is the second most spoken language in the world. Did you know if you speak Spanish you can communicate with nearly 500 million people? In an age of increased global communication and travel it's no surprise that Spanish is one of the most popular additional or "foreign" languages being studied as having a basic knowledge of Spanish is a great help when travelling abroad.

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