

## IMPROVING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY WITHIN AN AMERICAN COMPANY OVERSEAS

### **Challenge:**

#### **Creating an initiative to raise the English-language skills of an entire subsidiary.**

In 1978, Johnson & Johnson (J&J), an American manufacturer of a wide range of health care goods, established a Japanese subsidiary, Johnson & Johnson K.K. (J&J K.K.). Currently, J&J K.K. operates three companies: the Consumer Company, the Vision Care Company and the Medical Company. Because J&J K.K. has strong ties with overseas enterprises, including its parent company in the United States, the ability to effectively communicate in English is extremely important, especially for executives. Until recently, improving English proficiency was left to the employees' own resourcefulness and sufficient support from the company was lacking. With expectations to succeed in the global marketplace rising every year, the Japanese subsidiary needed to make English proficiency a top priority.

### **Solution:**

In the year 2000, the Medical Company of J&J K.K. decided that improving English within the company would become not just a priority, but an all-out initiative. To signal this effort, they announced two new policies. The first was to adopt a promotion policy related to TOEIC scores. The company established its score standards for each job category and position. Then they used those standards as criteria for promotions. Presently, there are situations where an employee who has not attained a required score gets a promotion. But those employees must achieve the target score within two years.

The second course of action was to reform the English study support system. As it were, J&J K.K. paid 50% of English-conversation school tuition for employees who voluntarily took the TOEIC test and reached a certain level of improvement in their scores. As of 2000, the scholarship became dependent upon two conditions: the TOEIC test would be mandatory for employees once a year and, as before, employees must meet TOEIC score levels set by the company to attend an English-conversation school.

The TOEIC test is also given to newly recruited employees before they begin working, to help make them aware of their English proficiency level, and what improvements need to be made. In addition, J&J K.K. administers an optional TOEIC IP (Institutional Program) test twice a year for employees.

### **Result:**

The employees of the Medical Company of J&J K.K. have a better grasp of the English language than ever before. Currently, about 70 employees every year, more than 14 times the number prior to 2000, are obtaining tuition scholarships. And the number of employees taking the TOEIC IP test has tripled since it was first administered. Overall, scores are consistently improving and the success is contributing to rising enthusiasm among employees. With the help of the TOEIC test, a new era of English proficiency has been ushered in at J&J K.K. And the company is a more competitive player in the global marketplace.