



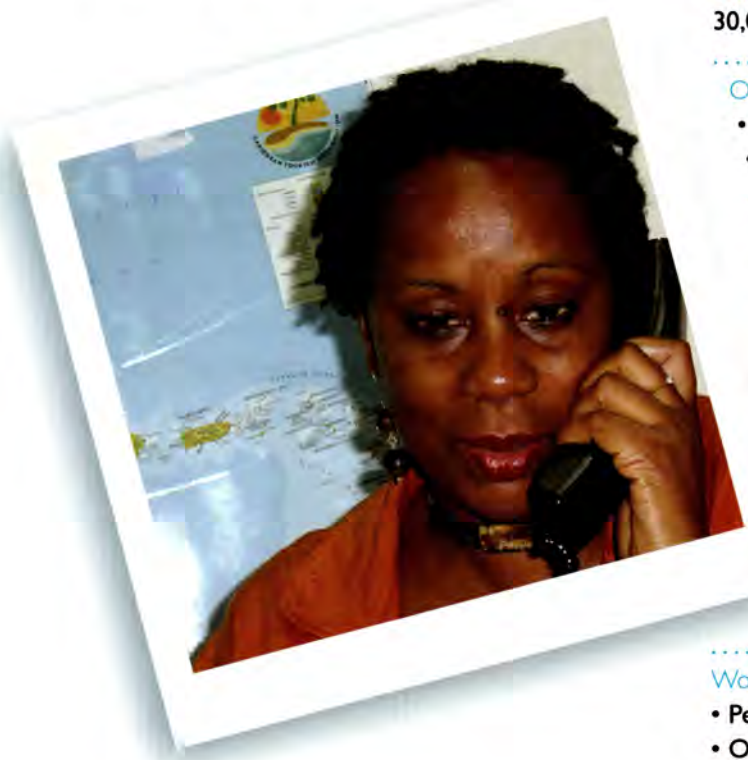
# Recruitment, Screening and Hiring

Attracting, interviewing and hiring the right person for a job are essential for good customer service. Until recently, recruitment and selection of those working in the tourism/hospitality sector in many parts of the world was somewhat haphazard. However, recruitment, selection and hiring have become more formalized lately, guided by requests for curricula vitae, in-depth interviews, basic aptitude tests, background checks, references and properly developed job descriptions that clearly identify the responsibilities of positions.

# Finding the Right Fit

## Malibu Visitor Centre

Learning from past experience, this small attraction created a screening programme to select the best candidates for new job openings. When making hiring decisions, management factors in its employees' opinions – including staff on the interview panel and listening to the feedback of those who have worked along side potential participants in the pre-employment component.



### COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Where  
Barbados

Mission statement

- To treat every person who walks through our front door as if he/she is our own personal guest
- To encourage visitors to visit and to re-visit both Barbados and the Malibu Visitor Centre
- To maintain the highest standards of friendliness, cleanliness and all round service to all who visit

Type of business

Attraction

Size

30,000 visitors per year, and increasing

Ownership

- Private sector
- Unionized

Operating

7 years

Management structure

- Independent
- Subsidiary of Goddard Enterprises

Key products and services

- Half-hour tours of the distillery that produces Barbados Malibu Rum
- Cocktail bar, seafront patio lounge, gift shop and beaches

Workforce

- Peak season: 16 full-time, 5 part-time
- Off season: 16 full-time, 2 part-time

In-house incentive programmes

- Salary increases annually
- Medical plan
- Non-contributory pension plan
- Group life insurance plan

Awards received

Nominated for the Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association Service Provider of the Year (2002)

## The HR Challenge

The challenge was to develop better recruitment and screening strategies, enabling management to confidently select the best candidates for the operation. It is disappointing and costly to have to let an employee go or to have him/her leave because the fit was not right.

### Overview

Cruise ships recommend the Malibu Visitor Centre to their passengers as the one attraction not to be missed on a tour of Barbados. The Centre is the home of the West Indies Rum Distillery, where Barbados Malibu Rum is made. This is the island's largest coconut rum distillery, and visitors learn the history and secrets behind rum production by seeing various stages of fermentation, age blending and the ancient art of barrel making.

The Malibu Visitor Centre has a reputation for being exceptionally clean and for providing visitors with friendly, quality service during tours of the seafront centre. Having a small number of staff, the Malibu Visitor Centre relies on its employees to work as a close-knit team. Although its HR activities are carried out through its parent company, Goddard Enterprises, the manager is responsible for hiring decisions.

## Implementation Steps:

1. Concerns about turnover prompted management to develop an in-house programme that would help in hiring the candidates best suited to the work of a busy visitor centre.
2. The manager and assistant manager developed the objectives and basic programme components, with input from staff.
3. With staff cooperation, the programme was incorporated into the Visitor Centre's recruitment and hiring practices.
4. Before selecting new employees, management reviewed the pre-employment interview, observed the candidate's trial performance and asked for staff feedback from those who had worked closely with the candidate.
5. Management tracked turnover through informal staff performance reviews. To improve this monitoring system, performance reviews are being conducted more frequently. When an individual leaves the organization, management conducts a follow-up interview with the employee to find out if organizational policies and/or procedures need to be modified to prevent further turnover.

# What Was Done

Concerned about its annual 7 per cent turnover rate over a seven-year period, the centre developed a better recruitment and selection process two years ago to help find candidates with good language and interpersonal skills. The idea of creating the resulting programme came from informal discussions between the manager and assistant manager on how to better screen prospective employees. While developing the programme, the manager felt that it was important to include staff in the process. Employees embodying the best attitudes and skills were asked to:

- make suggestions
- sit in on interviews with candidates
- observe a candidate's behaviour and skills while working with him or her for a day

The screening and selection programme developed into seven basic steps:

## 1 Application form

## 2 Pre-employment interview

The manager, assistant manager and one or two staff members interview all new applicants. During the interview, management observes the individual's interaction with other staff members. The manager always asks the prospective employee:

- Why are you interested in this position?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?

The Malibu Visitor Centre has found that asking candidates to talk about their strengths and weaknesses can help the interviewer see how well individuals know themselves. If the individual is hired, this candid information can be used in orientation and training sessions to focus on perceived weaknesses and turn them into strengths.

## 3 Pre-employment paid work

Candidates are invited to undergo a trial day of work at the centre so that management can see how they perform in the workplace. The potential employee is observed while shadowing a staff member and also when on breaks. He or she is not scrutinized but merely observed in a casual way. Not all staff members participate in this monitoring. The Malibu Visitor Centre can be very busy, so it is important that an employee can handle the stress of many people asking questions and making requests. During the pre-employment work period, management and staff are observing:

- how the candidate interacts with guests
- whether the candidate's personality comes through in a positive manner
- how the candidate treats co-workers
- whether the candidate can take direction well

Sometimes prospective employees can only give short periods of time, but management likes them to work for at least one full day and during a busy period. This gives the candidate a good idea of the actual working conditions and job.

#### 4 Initial walk of the property with junior staff

The initial walk of the property is to allow potential candidates to:

- ask some general questions
- meet some of the current staff
- observe working conditions

How a candidate reacts and the questions that he or she asks both give the manager valuable insights, as candidates often say things or ask questions that might not be asked or said in the formal interview.

#### 5 Second language skills tested practically

Since knowing how to converse in a second language is part of the hiring criteria, once a candidate has gone through the first four steps, he or she is asked to have a conversation with one of the staff members who is fluent in the second language that the candidate speaks. The employee asks general questions and gathers a sense of the candidate's personality and bilingual proficiency.

#### 6 Informal debriefing of staff

At the end of the first five steps, the manager asks staff members who participated in the interview and interacted with the candidate for their impressions of the prospective employee in terms of:

- the candidate's overall feel for the job
- how the candidate handled stressful situations
- how the candidate answered guests' questions

The candidate's reactions and conduct is not measured against a rating system. Rather, the manager trusts the staff members to be objective because they will be working with the new candidate every day should he or she be hired.

#### 7 Employment decision

Ultimately the manager makes the employment decision after evaluating the interview and reviewing staff opinions.

### Results

Since implementing its new recruitment and selection programme, the Malibu Visitor Centre does not have difficulty retaining staff. Better hiring choices has meant that the employees are well suited to their jobs. In addition, a good working relationship between staff members, coupled with pleasant working conditions, are reasons why employees stay on.

There may not be opportunities for professional development at the centre, but employees appreciate the positive incentives such as the medical plan, non-contributory pension and group life insurance coverage and annual salary increases.

As a result of the new recruitment and selection programme, employee performance has improved, as has employee commitment to the company. These results have been sustained for the medium term and the system has proven to work well. The manager sees the pre-employment work component as its main strategy for hiring qualified employees. There have been situations where potential employees have come in for a work session and found that they were not suited

for the position. It is easy to resolve such a situation at this time, as there is no formal contract. Potential candidates are told up-front that the day's work is for assessment purposes – assessment by both the candidate and the manager.

Candidates are paid for their time. If there is not an obvious fit, in most cases both parties see that the position does not suit the individual's skills and abilities.

Generally, there is more than one person competing for a job, so the individual that is viewed as the best candidate is selected. No explanation is required for those parties not chosen. However, other good candidates are kept on file for future reference.

### Staff Reactions

Since the centre has an informal work atmosphere, and considering the level of staff involvement, the manager did not feel it necessary to train staff members before the new programme was implemented. All employees were briefed on the programme's objectives and asked to cooperate, and this they did freely because they recognized that their feedback was taken into account when new employees were being hired.

### Monitoring

The programme continues to be monitored by the manager through general observation. Over the two years that it has been operating, there has been no need for programme refinements.

## Key Lessons for Smaller Operations

For small and medium-size operations wanting to implement a similar programme, the Malibu Visitor Centre has these suggestions:

- Give front-line staff the autonomy to be involved in the decision-making process.
- Be guided by staff opinions in recruitment and selection.

## Discussion Questions

1. The Visitor Centre has achieved good results by allowing front-line staff to be involved in decisions about future team members. Why does careful thought and care have to go into this process? What guidelines would you consider creating regarding front-line staff and management working together in this way?

2. The cost of unplanned turnover is high. In addition to the expense of recruitment advertisements, what do you think are other actual costs to a business when a staff member leaves and another has to be hired and trained?

3. What are some other ways that businesses can encourage staff loyalty and retention?

