



# Management and Leadership Styles

In today's tourism environment, a more demanding customer and a constantly evolving business environment require leaders to focus as much on the management of people as on other aspects of business operations.

# Leading the Way in Employee Involvement

## The Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center

Knowing that its daily operation affects the preservation of the region's wildlife and habitat, the Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center is concerned about running an efficient and sustainable organization. For this reason, the Zoo Director has trained all managers to be strong leaders, focused on the management of people and the zoo's bottom line, and to work as a team with the understanding that they all hold a stake in the success of the organization.



### COMPANY SNAPSHOT

#### Where

Belize

#### Mission statement

- Committed to the conservation of Belize's wildlife and its habitats, through the establishment of a well-maintained zoological facility and education centre
- To bring about greater environmental awareness in the people of Belize

#### Type of business

Zoo and wildlife education facility

#### Ownership

- Private sector
- Not unionized

#### Operating

21 years

#### Management structure

- Independent

#### Key products and services

- Exhibits over 125 native animals of Belize in natural savanna surroundings and provides research and internship opportunities, environmental education and enjoyable recreation

- 26 full-time

#### In-house incentive programmes

- Transportation to work (bus fare)
- Health care when required
- Loans with lower interest rates and automatic deductions from pay cheques
- Recognizing staff efforts to improve zoo services
- Monthly social events

[www.belizezoo.org](http://www.belizezoo.org)

## The HR Challenge

Located in a remote geographical area, the Belize Zoo and Tourism Education Center provides an opportunity for local and foreign visitors to learn about the animals of Belize and to understand why it is important to protect the Belize savanna environment. The management team at the zoo needed to enhance its leadership skills in order for:

- the team to work together and create better communication between departments
- the facility to effectively address its mission and values
- the organization to run efficiently in the absence of the Zoo Director
- managers to confidently empower front-line employees and provide them with the skills to do their jobs effectively

## Overview

In 1983, a number of wild animals used in making documentary films about tropical forests found a home when the Belize Zoo was created on 29 acres of savanna land. It did not take long for this small backyard operation to develop into a dynamic wildlife education facility. The zoo created a department specifically for public education and established the Tropical Education Center on 84 acres adjacent to the zoo three years later.

### Selection

It is management's role to make sure that all the zoo's employees know the importance of their jobs and the impact that the entire organization has on the wildlife, habitat and people of Belize. Because of this, the Belize Zoo aims to hire the best possible staff. A new staff member is only hired if the

management team is in agreement – all hiring decisions are made together.

Employment positions at the Belize Zoo are made known through word-of-mouth promotion by existing staff and through advertisements in the local newspapers. These two recruitment sources generate numerous candidates for vacant and new positions at the zoo.

During the selection process, management uses set skills criteria regarding what they look for in a potential candidate, and the requirements from the job description are used to evaluate individuals during the interview. The right personality is extremely important, as the individual needs to be a good fit in the organization.

### Learning opportunities provided

Once hired, both front-line staff and middle management have the opportunity to:

- take training courses
- participate in professional development activities
- attend conferences

The zoo pays for all costs as long as the learning opportunities deal with natural resources, are beneficial to staff and are appropriate to the employee's particular position. Recently, for example, the Animal Management Supervisor attended a conservation workshop in Mexico. Two other employees have participated in an internationally-known zoological/conservation training course on the Island of Jersey in the Channel Islands.

Managing rare and endangered species means that employee training at all levels is tailored to the specific position and the importance of

the responsibility. For this reason, adequate resources are devoted to purchasing books, videos and cassette tapes that deal with Belize's zoology and natural history.

In addition to furthering individual skills, the Belize Zoo provides many social events for front-line staff and management. Such activities include:

- monthly after-work events that include food, music and drinks
- celebrations on the completion of special events, such as when a visiting film crew wraps up its work at the zoo
- staff birthday celebrations at a local restaurant with cake, games, contests and a gift for every child (family members are also included)

### *Staying ahead of competitors*

By introducing HR strategies and activities that improve employees' skills, knowledge and contentment in their place of work, the Belize Zoo is staying ahead of its competitors. Its positive working environment keeps turnover low and contributes to an important cause – preserving the wildlife and natural environment of Belize.

By bringing people into contact with wildlife and the area's natural heritage, the Belize Zoo encourages them to recognize that these natural resources are worth saving. For the people of Belize, the zoo instills a sense of pride and offers a unique opportunity to learn about wildlife.

## Implementation Steps:

1. An in-house programme was developed to create an open work environment (i.e., one in which staff members are encouraged to offer constructive feedback without fear of retribution) with two main purposes: (1) to get managers to work as a team and (2) to make employees and managers understand that the organization can only meet its goals if departments work together.
2. The Zoo Director and team leaders discussed ideas, issues and solutions from each department every week. For example, the Gift Shop Manager suggested that the zoo purchase ice cream from a local small business rather than from a US distributor. The management team approved the idea because a local company could provide ice cream at a lower cost and the gift shop could continue to generate a profit.
3. Each manager conducted on-the-job training covering all areas of the zoo so that every employee understood the organizational structure and the importance of roles within the operation.
4. Regular meetings between the five managers and the front-line staff were established to voice concerns and to address problems and any other issues affecting zoo operations. Informal communications were also encouraged to discuss specific issues in each area.

5. To build on the positive working environment, regular social events and monetary bonuses were created to generate a team atmosphere. This also rewarded good ideas from all staff.

6. Visitor comments are assessed every year to monitor whether the zoo is achieving its mission. Improvements are implemented continuously.

## What Was Done

The zoo's education programmes are geared toward the general public and international visitors, as well as to primary and secondary students throughout Belize. It is estimated that 10,000 students and over 600 teachers visit the zoo and education facility annually and participate in its programmes.

The zoo's success, however, depends on all employees understanding the importance of their jobs and roles at the zoo. For management, everyone matters, as do all employees' opinions and concerns. By creating a positive and pleasant work environment, the Belize Zoo has gained the respect of its employees, of the people of Belize and of visitors and colleagues from around the world. From the beginning, the Zoo Director created a positive, team-focused atmosphere to foster a cooperative and empowering environment for all employees and management.

## Results:

Empowering managers and front-line staff increases open discussions between all levels of the organization. Such discussions include the order in which to renovate particular exhibits and the use of vehicles to reduce the

two-hour bus ride to work for employees. The zoo's success is dependent on good leadership within the management team.

### *Staff reactions*

There was no resistance from staff members to the new programme, as they liked the informal and empowering environment that rewards cooperation and individual initiative.

### *Monitoring*

The success of the leadership programme is monitored by tracking the annual number of visits and by reviewing visitor comments.

### *Challenges*

Sometimes new employees arrive with negative perceptions of this type of open management style, i.e., an informal working environment in which staff members are encouraged to offer constructive feedback without fear of retribution. If this occurs, experienced staff members work with these individuals to help them understand that the focus of all employees is to help the organization meet its mission and values.

### *Future HR issues*

For the Belize Zoo, the most important HR issue in the future will be the transfer of leadership to a new zoo director. A new director will need to continue to work toward achieving the zoo's mission and values. Succession planning and developing new skills for managers are ongoing. The management team will select a new zoo director when it becomes necessary.

## Discussion Questions

1. The Belize Zoo encourages employees to participate in outside professional development conferences and workshops, provided that learning opportunities are directly related to the job. The fact that it meets the costs of employees attending such activities is often much appreciated by staff. While improving their job-related knowledge and skills development, it is also seen as a perk. What are the guidelines that should be in place to ensure that outside professional development activities are a good investment for the business?

2. This successful attraction has emphasized the importance of interdepartmental communication, through regular meetings, as a key HR strategy. What are other ways in which interdepartmental communication can be improved?

3. The Belize Zoo is considering how these progressive HR strategies can be continued under the leadership of a future new director. This is a challenge for all businesses as good managers choose to move on or retire. What advice would you have for this business to ensure that succession planning is successful?

# Hands-on Management Works for Small Operator

## Sammy T's Resort

It took Sammy Thurston 24 years to realize his dream of running his own hotel. Now a resort owner and operator, Sammy eats and sleeps there to be involved in everything and, more importantly, so that he can understand the experiences of his guests. His hands-on approach is applied in every aspect of his resort, particularly his philosophy of customer service, which involves anticipating the guests' needs.

COMPANY  
SNAPSHOT

Where  
Bahamas

Mission statement

- Take it to the next level

Type of business

Beach resort

Size

- Rooms: 6 (1-2 bedroom) villas
- Restaurant and patio seating: 44
- Pool deck seating: 24

Ownership

- Private sector
- Not unionized

Operating

1 year

Management structure

- Owner-operated

Key products and services

- A restaurant that has "the best cook on the island"
- A pool, fishing boats and water sports
- Catering facilities for local banquets and parties

Workforce

- 6 full-time

In-house incentive programmes

- Employee of the Month
- Medical
- Travel discounts
- Meals in the on-site restaurant

[www.sammytbahamas.com](http://www.sammytbahamas.com)



# The HR Challenge

Having hired all staff members from the small island where his resort is situated, Sammy Thurston has a knowledgeable team that knows the history of the area and can advise guests on what to see and do on Cat Island. The island is a 30-minute plane ride from Nassau, with no main town but rather a collection of small communities.

Sammy's challenge has been how to impart to his employees his philosophy of providing the ultimate in customer service so that, in his absence, the same level of guest service is provided. The management style he is using to oversee his staff's training is one he has developed on his own and is based on his experiences in other hotels, retail operations and the banking industry.

## Overview

Since 1980, when Sammy told his graduating class that he would one day own his own hotel, he has worked diligently to achieve this goal. Now, as a resort owner, he instructs his staff in how they are to deliver on his vision of providing the ultimate in customer service. Sammy frequently reminds his employees to, *"Stand in the shoes of the guest. What do YOU think they would expect?"* It is this philosophy that is behind all of Sammy T's HR policies. Since he has developed the resort's policies himself and trained his employees in all daily operations, there is not one person solely responsible for HR matters. According to Sammy, *"Everyone does everything. We are all HR representatives, working towards the same goal of providing the ultimate in customer service."*

# Implementation Steps:

1. The resort's in-house policies and procedures manual was developed from past work experiences.
2. Sammy trained staff and continually remains on-site to ensure that the policies are followed.
3. A 10-point programme to provide employees with weekly performance evaluations was developed.
4. Weekly staff meetings were initiated to go over each employee's 10-point evaluations and to discuss guests' questions, how staff answered the questions and the best response, given the situation. For example, a guest ordered a local beer to take down to the beach. It is a bit of a walk, so Sammy suggested to the employee that he offer to put six chilled beers in a cooler for the guest to take with him. This way the guest could have another cold beer without having to walk back to the resort's bar. Any unused beer could easily be returned.
5. Sammy conducts a performance appraisal every six months and reviews it with the employee.
6. Sammy constantly provides training on a one-on-one basis.

## What Was Done

Sammy's management approach is hands-on. Guests and staff alike see Sammy at all times. He does not expect his staff to do anything he would not do himself, including clearing tables and taking out the garbage. So that his employees understand the guest experience, he invites them to dine in the restaurant where he will serve them so that they can see how it should be done.

Having spent his summers on Cat Island at his family home, he knows the history and island way of life. However, often his local employees have not understood the expectations of the high-end clientele. Sammy developed training procedures to help his employees understand what those expectations are and how to follow through on them 100 per cent of the time.

### Selection and retention

On an island with high unemployment, Sammy found an abundant supply of workers with front-line experience in housekeeping and food and beverage service. Candidates with people-management, organizational, supervisory and hotel management experience are harder to find, however.

Having only been open for one year, Sammy has the same staff that he initially hired. There is no change in staff levels between high and low season. During the low season, staff members provide more banquet functions to the local community and remain employed full-time.

Concerned about keeping his qualified employees, however, Sammy makes sure that they are happy and have an enjoyable work environment. He provides his staff with good

health and insurance benefits and encourages employees to contribute their ideas for improvements. For example, the staff came up with the system of pooling tips received from guests, a programme they find is working well.

### Learning opportunities provided

Since Sammy T's Resort is so new, the employees are focused on learning the policies and procedures of the in-house training manual that Sammy developed. Each of his employees has participated in BahamaHost, which is the country's service quality training programme. To remind staff of their local customer service training, Sammy posts signs at the back-of-house saying, 'Remember to Smile'.

He also developed a 10-point programme that evaluates employees on:

- guest interactions
- performance of duties
- willingness to assist

Sammy observes the employees as they are working and he grades them on a scale of 1-10 each week. Employees can gain points for performing 'above and beyond' and lose points for overlooking something that they should have done.

The ratings are reviewed at weekly meetings so that employees know the areas where they are falling short and need to improve. Also highlighted are successes for other employees to follow. At the end of the month, scores are tallied up and the employee with the highest score is awarded Employee of the Month. Prizes for this award include discount flights to Nassau and dinners.

### *Staying ahead of competitors*

Ensuring that all employees are cross-trained to deliver all aspects of the resort's daily operations and also that they provide quality service is the resort's strategy for staying ahead of its competitors. In a challenging environment, Sammy hopes that focusing on cross-training will be a strength. For example, when front desk employees have been pulled away from their duties, it is not uncommon for the cook to come out and staff the front desk.

### *Results:*

Sammy's leadership style has worked well. He tries his best to make Sammy T's a place where employees look forward to working every day, and sometimes he has to remind them that their shift is over.

Sammy frequently accompanies the staff to guest rooms, in the restaurant and around the grounds noting what needs attention or what may have been missed.

Within the first year of operation, Sammy T's Resort has had a lot of repeat business and referrals. Having 'the best restaurant on the island' is why the resort also gets local business for graduation parties and banquets.

### *Staff reactions*

Employees have easily accepted Sammy's hands-on management and leadership style as he does not ask them to do anything that he will not do himself. With a small staff and constant one-on-one training, Sammy has created a real family feeling at the resort. This is part of his management approach. If employees feel a part of the resort, they will deliver customer service as if it is their own business.

### *Monitoring*

Sammy is constantly monitoring his employees

to be sure that they have learned how to anticipate the needs of the resort's guests. This is a new concept for his island staff but one that they are working at embracing.

### *Challenges*

The main challenge has been instructing staff on how to anticipate the resort guests' needs. This comes from the employees having had little exposure to the outside world and not being familiar with the expectations of a discerning clientele.

### *Future HR issues*

The most important HR issue for Sammy T's Resort is finding a junior manager. Sammy is constantly looking for someone to bring on with hotel industry experience in people management, supervision and local knowledge.

After talking to recent graduates of the hotel management programme in Nassau, he feels his biggest challenge will be to find someone who will want to move to a small island where there is little infrastructure.

## Discussion Questions

1. This small resort is off to a good start, with no turnover in the first year and a staff that is growing into their expected roles. What HR challenges would you predict might need to be addressed in the second and third years of an operation such as the one described?
2. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of employee of the month recognition schemes?
3. Sammy T's has weekly meetings with its team. What do you feel is the ideal frequency for meetings of employees of a small tourism business? Why? Should this be different for larger organizations?