



Job Mobility and Career Development

Creating a great place to work that also provides staff with the prospect of a bright future helps organizations to keep good people. Whether full-time or part-time, employees are more committed to an organization that can provide them with a clear picture of potential, ongoing career advancement opportunities. When upward advancement is not likely because of the size of the business, then creative job-sharing and multi-tasking opportunities provide variety and ongoing interest for employees.

Understudy Programme – Enhancing Front-Line Customer Service Skills

Beaches Turks & Caicos Resort & Spa

Needing to share experienced workers' skills and knowledge with staff who are new to the tourism industry, this island resort developed an in-house programme, pairing understudies with experienced employees.

Where

Turks and Caicos Islands

Mission statement

- To offer the ultimate Caribbean vacation experience by innovatively, reliably and consistently providing the safest and highest quality services and facilities to guests

Type of business

- Resort
- Private sector

Size

- Number of rooms – 456
- Dining room capacity – 917
- Conference room capacity – 460

Ownership

- Private
- Not unionized

Operating

8 years

Management structure

- Independent

Key products and services

- Three conference and banquet rooms with state of the art audiovisual capabilities and wireless Internet

Workforce

- Peak season: 800 full-time
- Off-season: 700 full-time

In-house incentive programmes

- Monetary awards and prizes for service
- Employee of the Month award
- Birthday club (gift and card on each staff member's birthday)

Awards received

- General Manager's Award
- Manager of the Year
- Supervisor of the Year
- Team Member of the Year

www.beaches.com/main/tc/tc-home.cfm



The HR Challenge

The Turks and Caicos Islands' climate, high-quality beaches and coral reefs are a paradise setting for Sandals Resorts International to operate an all-inclusive resort catering to those who wish to relax. Many local residents, however, were not familiar with the high level of customer service skills required of the island's newest income-generating sector: tourism.

The HR department at this Beaches resort needed to develop a training programme for its island staff in order to share the knowledge of experienced workers and to provide professional development opportunities for all employees.

Overview

Sandals Resorts International was a pioneer of the all-inclusive resort concept and is now world famous. One of the Caribbean's leading hotel groups, Sandals owns and operates 11 couples-only resort hotels in Antigua, the Bahamas, Jamaica and St. Lucia, offering upscale amenities such as gourmet dining and spa services. The company also operates six Beaches resorts that cater to families and singles.

Through its parent organization, Beaches Turks & Caicos Resort is able to draw on the experiences and ideas of a large number of employees. It can also capitalize on training opportunities through the many partnerships that Sandals has developed with local and overseas educational institutions. Beaches has created a reputation for itself as a good place to work by providing employees with opportunities for career development and job mobility within the Caribbean hospitality industry.

The Understudy Programme

The Understudy Programme was developed in-house to improve employees' front-line basic customer service skills and to assist the HR department in identifying candidates with the initiative to further their career goals.

Individuals who have been employed at the hotel for at least one year and have had a minimum of two good performance evaluations are eligible for the programme

Implementation Steps:

1. The HR department developed an on-the-job programme to mentor/coach workers by drawing on the resources of other experienced workers in the resort chain.
2. The HR department recommends employees that it feels are candidates for the Understudy Programme because they (1) need to improve existing skill sets and/or (2) show initiative in wanting to advance career goals.

The HR department identifies potential candidates by reviewing past evaluations and current work practices.

3. The HR department meets with the employee to explain the programme and why the HR department feels the individual would be a good candidate. If an employee agrees to participate, a mentor/coach from another resort joins the Beaches team and is paired with the under study. The coach can work with

more than one employee at a time.

4. By working with employees on the job, mentors improve less experienced employees' skills and knowledge. In addition, all participants attend a weekly class that covers a relevant topic, explaining the issue in detail and including hands-on participation.

Understudy candidates are also involved in occupational training and professional development activities available in-house through the training department. Courses are purchased from the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute for the following certifications:

- Certified Hospitality Supervisor (CHS)
- Certified Hospitality Departmental Trainer (CHDT)
- Certified Hospitality Trainer (CHT)
- Train-the-Trainer

5. The length of the Understudy Programme varies, depending on the individual and the position. Generally it is between six and twelve weeks. The programme focuses on front-line employees but is open to all staff levels.

6. The programme is monitored by the head of the employee's department, a government labour representative and the HR department. Regular meetings occur where this group sits down with the understudy to discuss the programme and to review the candidate's progress.

What Was Done

Because the resort was developed in an area where tourism is a large part of the economy, the available workforce fell short of the required skills and knowledge. Beaches responded by creating its Understudy Programme to improve the basic customer service skills of front-line employees. How better to use the knowledge and skills of experienced workers than to pair them with individuals with less experience?

The resort's HR department also offers career advancement opportunities, from certificates to support for master's degrees, through Sandals' many educational partnerships. Job mobility, staff exchanges and further education foster the corporate culture that Sandals is proud to call its own.

The Sandals approach involves selecting quality employees, providing its people with the skills and knowledge to do a job well and paying them better than many of its competitors.

Selection and retention

Beaches and Sandals are careful in selecting their employees. Management positions are hired by Sandals' head office in Jamaica. Executive management, management, supervisory and line positions are advertised in local papers. Interested individuals complete an application form and are interviewed by the manager of the individual property.

Beaches sets aside one day per week to conduct preliminary interviews. Qualifications are checked and, if results are positive and the first interview goes well, the applicant is interviewed by the head of the department. If this interview meets expectations, the applicant completes a final interview with the

hotel manager or general manager.

Beaches finds it has little difficulty in retaining staff. Its HR philosophy is to:

- emphasize training
- provide opportunities for exchanges with other properties
- treat staff members with respect
- encourage a friendly work environment

Additional learning opportunities provided

All employees have additional learning opportunities at Beaches' (and Sandals') properties. To begin with, each employee participates in a detailed orientation training when he or she is first hired. Also, a daily newsletter is circulated to all departments noting any training courses scheduled for the day, week and upcoming months.

Every team member must complete 120 hours of departmental training per calendar year. Topics include customer service, attitude and many other front-line service topics. Managers must complete 40 hours of training per calendar year. The department heads and the HR department monitor employees' progress and evaluations take place every six months.

Employee career development is important but so too are social/fun events at the resort. Beaches holds a quarterly staff fun day where employees and their families enjoy a beach outing including drinks and food. There is also a sports club at the resort that organizes games and regular competitive sporting activities throughout the year.

Staying ahead of competitors

Beaches provides intensive training to all staff to maintain its excellent service and facilities. Department heads and supervisors make coaching a regular part of their department's programmes.

HR strategies and policies are designed to create a positive environment for staff and to encourage employees to discuss ideas that will improve human resources within the organization. There are suggestion boxes for staff to provide comments.

At the suggestion of staff, department heads and supervisors do not attend all staff meetings and team members air issues of concern to HR and operations. As a result, employees are more comfortable expressing themselves and are willing to voice their grievances. Employees appreciate that HR and operations will provide a suggested course of action and respond to concerns at a later meeting, with anonymity being protected.

Results:

Implementation of the Understudy Programme continues, as the organization has approximately 800 employees and every employee needs to be assessed to determine if he or she is a good understudy candidate. The HR department is working with each department to implement the programme in all areas of the resort. Weekly departmental meetings are an important way for departments to keep abreast of how the programme is progressing.

So far the programme has worked well and, from the resort's perspective, is responsible for preparing participants for new career opportunities within the chain of resorts.

Staff reactions

Employees at Beaches welcomed the new programme. It has enabled employees to learn new skills, develop the confidence to express their ideas, have more career development opportunities and build a stronger team spirit.

Monitoring

The programme is monitored through the understudy's department head and three appointed representatives in-house. Quarterly meetings with these representatives and candidates have helped managers to develop a better link with staff and to better understand staff career goals. Guest customer service comments have indicated that the resort is exceeding service expectations and is providing a higher-than-normal satisfaction rate.

Future HR issues

Beaches identifies maintaining a good relationship with its staff as its most important HR issue for the future. To address this, the corporation's HR department continually encourages employees to develop their skill levels and regularly evaluates its existing HR programmes to make sure that these programmes motivate employees to do this.

Key lessons for smaller operations

For small and medium-size operations wanting to implement a similar programme, the Beaches Turks & Caicos Resort & Spa has these suggestions:

- Use open discussions to find out about staff members' career development needs.
- Determine how employees would like to develop the necessary skills to achieve career goals.

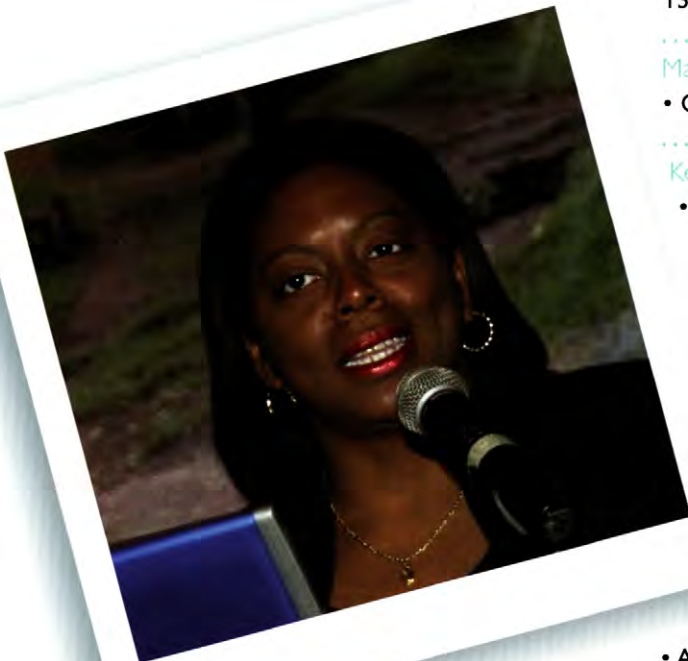
Discussion Questions

1. Beaches Turks & Caicos Resort & Spa has had some initial success with the Understudy Programme. What do you feel are the main pros and cons of this kind of employee support and skills-development programme?
2. Progress meetings are held quarterly with Understudy Programme candidates and the management/labour support team. What do you feel is the ideal frequency for informal and formal performance review meetings with employees going through a training support programme such as this one? Explain your reasons.
3. In addition to a willing and experienced mentor/coach, what other resources do you feel would be required for a programme like this to be successful?

Empowering Local Staff

Stafford Creek Fishing Lodge

While the owners of this small fishing lodge provide guests with an authentic Bahamian fishing experience, they also strive to give their staff daily encouragement to become tourism entrepreneurs. With the breaking down of old stereotypes, employees get a better sense of the career opportunities that they have with their employer and in the wider community.



COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Where

Bahamas

Mission statement

- To provide the highest level of service in the fly-fishing industry worldwide
- We aim to promote conservation through fly-fishing and to make Bahamian stakeholders number one in the industry

Type of business

- Fishing resort

Size

- 8 lodge rooms

Ownership

- Private
- Not unionized

Operating

13 years

Management structure

- Owner-operated

Key products and services

- Reputed to be one of the finest small bonefish fishing lodges in the world
- Offers specialized personal attention to all of its guests
- Small team is part of a big family that makes guests feel at home during their stay

Workforce

- 14 full-time

In-house incentive programmes

- Medical coverage
- Year-end bonus system
- Annual awards: Best Overall Employee
Most Improved Employee
Most Outstanding Staff Member

Awards received

- Endorsed by Bahamas Sport Fishing and Conservation Association

www.staffordcreeklodge.com

www.flyfishthebahamas.com

The HR Challenge

Stafford Creek Fishing Lodge has encountered many obstacles while trying to market its small fishing operation and promote sustainable development in an industry that is often dominated by US conglomerates.

By giving locals a stake in the fishing lodge and encouraging them to take charge of their own career paths, the owners hope that their staff will be encouraged to start their own tourism businesses or provide the lodge with local, value-added services developed in partnership with other community members. The lodge's biggest HR challenge is empowering its employees.

Overview

Prescott Smith, owner and premier fishing guide, is not shy about speaking his mind. He is the unofficial spokesperson for the need to empower local operators. Prescott wants to see an increased role for Bahamians in the Bahamas tourism industry. He is passionate about sustainable development and supporting local tourism operators.

Prescott and his wife Samantha have been providing guiding services since 1993 on a quiet creek-side opening on the east side of Andros Island. In 1998, they built eight cottages and furnished each with one-of-a-kind Andros pine furnishings and all the modern conveniences, offering clients comfortable surroundings and specialized personal attention. Prescott, Samantha and their small team of staff are dedicated to providing a world-class fishing experience.

Prescott has a high profile in the community

– due to his attempts to affect change in the way the locals are treated and his position on sustainable development – and he will tell you that his company is under a microscope. He is often judged with more scrutiny than other operators to make sure that he is 'walking the talk'.

Implementing environmentally-sustainable policies and procedures has sometimes cost him more money. Not all small operators could bear the additional cost of purchasing the necessary environmentally-friendly products and equipment. His dedication has, however, not gone unnoticed. The lodge has been used as a beacon for the Bahamas, and even the country's Prime Minister mentioned it as an example in a recent speech.

Implementation Steps:

1. Created methods to improve employees' work ethic and to educate local people as to why it is important to conserve an area's natural resources, that is, to:
 - (1) provide good careers for local people and
 - (2) sustain a renewable resource that employs local people in the sport fishing industry.
2. Developed various initiatives, such as:
 - getting employees to interact positively with visitors to reduce stereotypes of the local population
 - educating employees in what is needed to run a small business by allowing them to experience the reality of cause and effect
 - getting staff input in the development of workplace policies

- and procedures to obtain buy-in
- providing employees with the financial assistance and encouragement needed to develop their own businesses, so that employees can then operate as independent fly-fishing guides or continue on as staff members and provide ancillary services to the lodge, thus benefiting guest service.

3. Developed performance evaluations to monitor employee performance and encourage the development of a good work ethic.

4. Provided professional development courses to train employees in trade specialty courses, good customer relations and small business operating skills.

What Was Done

Stafford Creek Fishing Lodge depends on repeat business for its success. To meet repeat clients' needs and desires, a database is used to record their preferences, including the type of fishing they prefer and the foods and beverages that they like. This information allows the staff to tailor a return guest's experience to meet his/her every wish.

Prescott's HR strategies are focused on ensuring that his guests are provided with a quality fishing trip that is an authentic Bahamian experience. He focuses great energy on empowering the local people that he employs to make this happen. This is difficult, as many of them are neither used to being given these added responsibilities nor want to be given them. They often see tourism as just a job.

To change old habits, and to improve the guest-host relationship, Prescott requires that his staff have dinner with their clients. This helps employees to understand that they need to:

- keep up with current affairs and investments, so that they can talk intelligently to other people
- learn that they should not be nice to guests only to receive a good tip, but that they need to have a genuine interest in them, as employees are involved in guests' fishing holidays

Stereotypically, many of the locals are intimidated by Caucasians and revert to a role of being subservient. Sitting down with guests puts residents on an equal footing and helps broaden their views on what is required to run a tourism business. Prescott and Samantha have seen some progress. For example, the lodge's former chef started his own restaurant in Nassau.

Another strategy, although it has been slow to implement, is teaching and encouraging staff members to tie fishing flies. Employees can earn extra money in their spare time by tying these flies, an activity that is highly demanded by visitors.

Employees have also done well at producing and selling souvenirs, such as mugs with the SCL logo on them, to sell at the lodge. This has been a great exercise in learning about business income, expenses, profits and losses. All of these initiatives have been implemented gradually since the lodge opened. The ideas are a combination of input from guests, family and friends and from Prescott's and Samantha's experiences.

Selection and retention

The lodge has little staff turnover. However, Prescott will tell you that there is a shortage of qualified fishing guides in the area. Although there is an abundant supply of local workers for a variety of positions, often the work ethic of the local inhabitants is not what the lodge is seeking. According to Prescott, *"Finding the people is easy, but they do not want to do the job that is required."*

To keep fishing guides, in particular, Prescott will tell you that money is not enough. To be successful, a guide needs to have excellent local knowledge on topics such as weather, tides, fish species and regional ecology. A number of individuals hired have not been motivated to become better informed, even when they can make US\$300-\$400 a day as guides.

When recruiting employees for their lodge, Prescott and Samantha first look for a good work ethic in a candidate. They test individuals before they hire them to make sure that the candidate has a passion for what he/she does. For a guide, for example, Prescott wants an individual who loves the outdoors and has a keen interest in fishing. The guide needs to be committed to making sure the anglers are having a good time.

Once an individual is hired, Prescott and Samantha make the employee a stakeholder in the business. For example, Prescott has helped his guides to purchase their own boats and vehicles (costing anywhere from US\$50,000 to US\$60,000) so that they can operate as independent business people. There is ample business at the lodge for Prescott's guides to operate independently. Prescott wants his guides to build up their own businesses because it promotes

conservation among the locals and it helps them become stakeholders in the industry.

Guides quickly learn the importance of providing good service. They need not fear penalties for bad performance from Stafford Creek itself, because the cost of poor service may be losing a client while they must still make payments on their equipment.

Learning opportunities provided

Prescott and Samantha developed an employee handbook and encouraged staff to provide their input to increase their buy-in to the lodge's policies and procedures. According to Prescott, *"Having [staff] involved has made the policies good for them and good for the company."*

All employees take the BahamaHost programme, delivered through the local labour board, to improve their front-line communication and customer service skills.

Prescott is also very supportive of the Fly-Fishing Guide Certification. He not only ensures that all guides go through the process, but has also been involved in the development of certification and has taught some of the courses. The certification process involves taking courses in HR, public relations and business ethics.

Staying ahead of competitors

Prescott and Samantha pay attention to the little details of their business. Anglers tend to come back to the places where they have had good experiences, and they do not hesitate to tell Prescott what they like and do not like. Examples of personalized service include flying the Canadian flag for Canadian guests and getting a local fisherman to deliver fresh crab

for the evening's dinner when it is known that a guest likes crab.

Results:

Encountering local resistance in the community and from his staff does not deter Prescott. He challenges the stereotypes. What Prescott has found is that by encouraging more employee input, he is helping staff to understand the benefits of the local tourism industry and how important it is to be involved in it.

Staff reactions

Overall, employees have come to appreciate the work environment that Prescott and Samantha have developed at Stafford Creek, although some employees struggle with the freedom they are given to interact with guests. Generally, most of them have not had this opportunity in other jobs. With continued encouragement and confidence-building, however, employees are doing well and interacting effectively with these high-end guests.

Efforts to make employees independent entrepreneurs – whether as fishing guides, or selling souvenirs or tying fishing flies – has helped all staff members understand what it is like to run a small business. According to Prescott, staff members, especially the guides, realize, *“There is nothing to hide under. Their success is determined by their own actions.”*

Monitoring

To monitor lodge employees, regular performance appraisals are conducted. The reviews are not always good. Prescott expects constant improvements because this is what his clients expect.

Guides do not need to be monitored because they have a stake in the business. If a guide does not perform well, he/she will not get reprimanded as the guest will simply ask for another guide. It is a cause-and-effect relationship, says Prescott.

All guest comments, however, are taken seriously and acted on. Since so many customers are repeat business, the guests are like family and they do not hesitate to report any deficiencies immediately.

Future HR issues

Prescott's biggest HR issue is the attitude some clients have toward the locals, and the locals' intimidation by Caucasian visitors. It demoralizes staff when clients view the Bahamas as a third world country and appreciate its local inhabitants only in serving roles. To address this, Prescott has empowered his staff to own and operate their own businesses and encouraged joint ventures within the company. This has made a big difference in boosting employee self-confidence. Employees are more self-assured and less intimidated. According to Prescott, *“They have to understand what they can do to make it happen and that it is not all revenue.”*

Key lessons for smaller operations

For other operations wanting to implement a similar programme, Prescott has these suggestions:

- To get the customer back as a repeat guest, everyone must work together to deliver the level of service expected.
- Set a good example for your staff by doing everything that you expect of them.

Discussion Questions

1. The Stafford Creek Lodge has raised the sensitive issue that many tourism operations face – that of employee’s perceptions relating to service versus servitude, and dealing with the sometimes difficult attitudes and outdated values of visitors. What are some additional ways that management and supervisors can deal with this in a productive way and help staff realize that excellent service is essential, but depends upon a mutually-respectful guest-host relationship?

2. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of the kind of working relationship that Stafford Creek Lodge has developed with its fly-fishing guides?

3. This operator has noted that (except for the fishing-related programmes) it has been difficult to find additional training for its contract employees. What are some options that operators in smaller or remote communities could consider in this situation?

