



Performance Planning and Employee Evaluation

Businesses committed to developing employees to their full potential regularly measure employee satisfaction, skills, abilities and motivation as well as the work climate. They do this to ensure that positive attributes, such as staff empowerment, job satisfaction and knowledge of business objectives, continue to be part of the corporate culture.

Random Drug-Testing Policy – Safety First!

Atlantis Submarines (B'dos) Inc.

Anticipating the potential problems that can arise with substance abuse among employees, Atlantis took the progressive step of setting up a random drug-testing policy. This underwater tourism operation has eliminated the chances of operator error due to drug abuse and improved guest and staff safety – its number one concern.

COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Where
Barbados

Mission statement

- To be a leader in providing leisure-seekers in Barbados with customer-centred entertainment experiences or adventures that are safe, high quality, fun, unique, educational and perceived as value for money

Type of business

- Underwater adventure tourism operator
- Private sector

Visitation

- 50,000 persons carried per year

Ownership

- Private
- Not unionized

Operating

16 years

Management structure

- Independent

Key products and services

- Atlantis Submarine
- Rhino Rider water safari tours

Workforce

- Peak – 22 full-time, 15 part-time
- Seasonal – 20 full-time, 10 part-time

In-house incentive programmes

- Awards for 5, 10 and 15 years of service
- Pay for performance (annual appraisal)
- Pay scales increase with each higher set of skills achieved
- Profit sharing (reservations staff)

Awards received

- Complimentary remarks from the Coordinator of the National Council for Drug Abuse

www.goatlantis.com



The HR Challenge

A key challenge facing Atlantis Submarines was maintaining its impeccable safety record as it moved to more part-time employees. An HR policy was required to teach existing staff to be responsible and wary of the effects of drugs, as well as to ensure that new part-time employees did not have drug abuse issues.

Overview

An adventure tourism operator has many liabilities, including dealing with the unpredictability of Mother Nature and the range of risks associated with guided outdoor expeditions. Policies and training procedures need to protect the safety of guests and staff, while at the same time minimizing an operator's legal liability through proper risk management.

Atlantis Submarines has a reputation for providing excellent customer service as well as having friendly, professional and knowledgeable staff. This tourism operator works hard to maintain its reputation and is proud to be insured by Lloyds of London.

It was the increasing use of illegal drugs in society, and the concern that new employees might have drug abuse problems, that prompted Atlantis Adventures to establish a random drug-testing policy five years ago.

Implementation Steps:

1. A drug-testing policy was developed in-house by adapting a similar system from an organization in the United States.

2. A local, recognized medical laboratory was contracted to randomly select and administer drug tests in all departments.

3. During a work day, the management team held group discussions with all staff on-site, providing explanations as to how the testing would work.

4. Once a month, a laboratory technician visits the office to test those randomly selected from the various departments. Tests are conducted on-site from the samples collected and are witnessed by the staff member concerned.

What Was Done

Like many tourism operators in the area, Atlantis Submarines does not have an abundant supply of qualified workers to select from. Management finds it particularly difficult to find staff qualified in the area of operations who also know how to swim.

Selection and retention

Most candidates learn of job openings through student internships available through Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic or through advertisements in the local newspapers. Potential candidates become aware of Atlantis Submarines' random drug-testing policy as its company policy is posted within advertised job descriptions. During detailed interviews, candidates are selected as much for their attitudes as for their qualifications or skills.

Other than its reliance on seasonal staff (often university students with varying availabilities), Atlantis Submarines finds it

does not have problems retaining staff once they are hired.

Motivating training environment

Employees of Atlantis Submarines receive on-the-job training in an enjoyable, open work environment, i.e., an informal working environment in which staff members are encouraged to offer constructive feedback without fear of retribution. In-house manuals and texts cover training content and, where relevant to the job, employees take courses at local institutions. These courses are paid for by the company.

The company believes its low turnover is because it provides:

- learning opportunities to all levels of employees, from front-line to senior management
- non-salary monetary benefits, such as pay-for-performance incentives
- higher pay scales for all employees if they study new manuals about their work and then successfully complete skill tests

Additional learning and motivating opportunities

Atlantis Submarines further encourages staff productivity and is able to improve job satisfaction through staff development programmes and activities such as:

- reimbursing staff for gym fees, thus encouraging health and fitness
- recognizing one employee monthly as the outstanding employee of the month
- giving awards for 5, 10 and 15 years of service
- establishing profit-sharing for reservations staff if retail sales targets are met

Staying ahead of competitors

By focusing on its service excellence and overall reliability as an adventure tourism operator, Atlantis Submarines feels it is competitive. It also believes, however, that to further its competitive advantage it should formalize informal practices that are working well. The company has begun updating the employee handbook and policies manual by including and detailing the procedures and policies that are showing results.

Random drug testing procedure

One of the key activities focused on staff performance is the random drug-testing procedure. Each month, Atlantis Submarines provides a staff schedule to the Barbados laboratory and a laboratory technician randomly selects staff from each department who will be tested for the month. The technician then visits the Atlantis Submarines' office and indicates who is to be tested. Approximately ten per cent of all employees are tested at a cost of US\$180.

The policy was initially in place only for staff members who were operating vessels, i.e., submarines and boats. The management team, however, agreed to be included as a show of leadership to all staff.

Onsite testing steps

1. Random drug testing is done with a male or female staff member accompanying the chosen employee to ensure that a fresh urine sample is taken.
2. The option to take a second sample for private testing is offered to the employee (he or she can take the second sample to a lab of his/her choice for consecutive testing). The employee signs to confirm whether he/she has requested a second

- sample or not.
3. The employee gives the sample to the technician in the receptacle provided, and witnesses the testing.
 4. The employee returns to work if the test is negative.

Positive testing policy

If a test is positive, the employee is asked to report to a supervisor.

1. The positive sample is taken to the lab for confirmation.
2. Results are returned to Atlantis Submarines for final review and a meeting with the employee is scheduled.
3. If the sample is positive, the employee is terminated and Atlantis Submarines provides a brief counselling session where it is suggested that the individual seek counselling from a professional agency.

Results:

The random drug-testing policy has worked well, particularly with new employees. The policy is credited for providing the company with:

- drug-free employees
- the continuation of an excellent safety record
- a more sensitive workplace

As one of the few companies that has an active drug-testing policy, Atlantis Submarines demonstrates that it remains focused on safety first, with corresponding benefits to its human resources.

Staff reactions

Coordinated through the operations manager, the new policy met with no significant employee resistance. There were a number of questions on the procedures, but otherwise, all staff recognized that a random drug-

testing policy assured a safe environment for those taking part in Atlantis Submarines' boating adventures.

The monthly testing only takes approximately 15-20 minutes from the work day and is credited with reinforcing the importance of the policy with only minimal disruption.

Challenges

Due to limitations of the contracted agency, it took six months before the random drug testing could be done monthly.

Modifications to the policy also occurred and were a result of management needing to speak with staff who had failed the test. As a result, management can now provide all staff with better guidance, advice and support in daily operations.

Future HR issues

Atlantis Submarines needs to maintain its high service standards as the company moves to employing more part-time staff. To address this challenge, plans are underway to strengthen the orientation process and the internal audit process.

Key lessons for smaller operations

For small- and medium-size operations wanting to implement a similar programme, Atlantis Submarines offers these comments from its experiences:

- Involve your employees throughout the development process.
- Openly discuss the mutual benefits of the programme.

Discussion Questions

1. How important is it for a company planning this kind of employee screening to use a reputable outside agency? Why?
2. What do you feel the appropriate supportive role of an employer should be when dealing with non-work personal issues (e.g., substance abuse, family stress) that may interfere with work performance? Why?
3. Atlantis expanded this random testing procedure to include management level staff as well. What do you feel the benefits of this decision might be?

A Final Note

Tourism is a labour-intensive, quality-driven service industry. Good employees are crucial to achieving objectives, delivering results and being successful. This handbook has looked at how to find, train, monitor and keep good employees, providing practical examples from industry leaders in the Caribbean region.

Finding employees who are keen, qualified and ready to work can be costly without better recruitment and screening strategies. Examples given here suggest the benefits of involving staff members in the interview process. Additionally, one company found that observing the candidate in a busy working environment for a day seems to reap real rewards. After new employees are hired, an in-depth orientation has been shown to be a very useful and effective way not only to welcome them, but also to help them become productive faster and stay with the company longer.

Successful companies have recognized that their employees are their greatest asset and that HR development is an investment for the future. Many of those featured here reimburse employees for courses that they take and/or enrol them in local training programmes. The handbook also provides examples of a number of in-house and customized training programmes that have helped friendly, quality service become second nature to staff members. Key to many of these programmes has been staff involvement in their planning and an open work environment, where employees are

able to express their opinions without fear of retribution.

Good managers and supervisors try to create workplaces in which people want to work and where contributions toward achieving company goals and objectives are recognized. One way of recognizing achievements is through a policy of in-house incentives and awards, as initiated by many of the companies included in the handbook. They have found this to be an effective, low-cost way of encouraging higher levels of performance.

The bottom line is for all employees to be well trained, competent, motivated and satisfied. The good practices showcased here have provided examples that can be adopted and adapted to improve HR strategies and procedures in the region – and help make the Caribbean tourism sector more productive and able to compete with the best.