



Preparing for a Diminishing Workforce

The good news is that vacation ownership, a \$10 billion industry, is growing at an unprecedented rate. The bad news? In five years, a shrinking labor pool—the sum of an aging population, a declining birth rate, and immigration restrictions—will challenge the service excellence and cultural experience that make up the fabric of timeshare’s success. To grow and compete, resorts must practice new management strategies, non-traditional recruiting methods, targeted retention initiatives, and continuous training.

Your Salespeople

Maintaining record growth depends partly on improving the image of timeshare with the first impression. Aggressive OPCs who misrepresent prospects, products, and incentives discredit the industry. Shifting the selection strategy to hire selectively, train sufficiently, and reward quality performance will help to alter timeshare’s image, and attract people who take pride in the services and products they represent.

The buyer buys the salesperson before they buy the timeshare. On the sales floor, custom vacation experiences are sold by those who are articulate and professional through superior service. Buyers want to feel heard and then respectfully guided to purchase a timeshare.

Creative Recruitment/Management

Jeff Pank, regional vice president for Shell Vacations Hospitality, says, “Resort growth depends on the ability to recruit and keep the right people.” To do this, non-traditional recruiting and retention methods must be implemented.

For instance, disabled employees can be highly capable, especially for call centers. Seniors, reports Manpower, are the largest untapped workforce group, and are more reliable and loyal than young workers. The 2002 AARP Work & Career Study reports that 53% of seniors say that working part-time contributes greatly to their job satisfaction, along with adequate time off and flexible scheduling. Other ideas include starting alumni groups of former associates to temp for special projects or

events, and then HR can help them stay connected thru newsletters or other communications.

Coaching is increasingly part of management training, as Marriott Vacation Club International, Scottsdale Camelback Resort, and the Grand Timber Lodge can attest. Progressive human resources departments pay attention to whole life, personal needs that impact an associate’s ability to continue to work. Viewing associates as valued internal customers has helped Welk Resorts reduce turnover significantly in the last two years. Investing in retention impacts the bottom line by reducing recruiting and training and by increasing the VPG through quality service.

Associate satisfaction surveys can show how engaged associates are. After sharing the results across the resort, when associates outline action plans for continuous improvement, they take ownership of their jobs, develop pride in their work, and see how their jobs link to business results. Teamwork, relationships with coworkers, and a sense of belonging contribute greatly to job satisfaction and retention.

Celebrity Resorts conducts employee opinion surveys and reports the results to department management teams, who develop action plans and present them to all associates. Last year, the Christie Lodge improved its previous employee assessment by asking in-depth questions about department managers who are eligible for coaching to increase their effectiveness. Using 360-performance feedback, the Grand Timber Lodge of-

fers voluntary coaching for management development.

Lessons Learned

By providing exit interviews, managers can improve selection, often by doing differently those things that also make them successful. One HR team heard from exiting associates that they did not like the benefits. In-depth probing by third party exit interviewers showed that associates did not understand their benefits. By training new hires on benefits several days after orientation, they could ask questions and fully understand their benefits. This alone positively impacted turnover.

When exit data shows some supervisors with higher turnover than others, mentoring or reassigning less effective supervisors may be the best cost-effective decision. When these decisions are data-driven decisions (versus “best guesses”), this is what is usually best for business.

When conducting exit interviews internally, as Jerry Sikes at Scottsdale Camelback Resort says, “It is difficult to tell if everything is the honest truth.” Which is why these interviews should be guaranteed confidential through an outsourced third party to obtain valid exit data—it’s well worth the cost.

Overall, focusing on recruiting, retaining, and management development makes good business sense, given the high cost of turnover and the forecast of a diminishing workforce. The Workforce Solutions can help ARDA members in cost-effectively addressing issues that contribute to today’s bottom line, while adding value for the future. **D**

Diane Irvin is senior vice president and co-founder of Strategic Programs, Inc. Her e-mail is dirvin@strategicprogramsinc.com.