

EXCEPTIONAL TALENT MANAGEMENT DRIVES EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

OVERVIEW

Canyons Resort is the largest ski resort in Utah and the third largest in the United States. In existence since the 1960's, the Park City resort was purchased in 2009 by real estate development company Talisker Mountain with a vision of making this renowned ski resort the #1 four-season mountain resort in North America.

Adding amenities that could be enjoyed year round was an important step in enhancing the customer experience. Plans included a golf course, hiking trails, zip-lining and more. However, the Canyons recognized that having the best people working at the resort would be the distinguishing factor in making them an eminent resort.

Greg Merrick, Vice-President of Human Resources, came to Canyons Resort in 2009. Upon his arrival, he found a need for an HR strategy linked to the company's overall goal. Hiring practices were decentralized and provided varied results. Individual managers were responsible for hiring their own people, which created inconsistencies in the process. The expectation was that each department would be able to secure a large number of "return" employees which would help the seasonal staffing needs significantly. According to Greg, "From a service culture standpoint, there were 150 well intentioned managers delivering 150 different levels of service. If a manager left, another change would occur." This process did not necessarily ensure that the very best customer-facing people were being hired at the Canyons.

CHALLENGE

Park City is 10,000 acres, 4,000 of it at Canyons. The resort operates 12 restaurants, three hotels, a private club and golf course supporting a variety of positions. Their ski resort is operated by lift mechanics, employees that run heavy equipment and create snow overnight. There are hotel front desk employees, housekeeping staff and more. Merrick's mission was to drive the guest experience through exceptional customer service, and he knew that in order to consistently deliver on his mission, the key would be to ensure strong job fit from point-of-hire and throughout an individual's employment with the Canyons.

"It is all about the customer experience and that starts with having the very best people working for you. The Predictive Index has played a key role in helping the Canyons in selecting and managing our employees for the very best outcome, supporting our mission to be the finest four-season resort in North America." Greg Merrick, Vice-President of Human Resources, Canyons Resort

Given the nature of the resort industry, however, the number of employees fluctuates dramatically season to season. At a high, Canyons Resort supports more than 2,000 staff members- 1,200 who are seasonal hires between November and April. The challenge of hiring and training such a large number of employees is difficult at best;

aspiring to be the #1 resort in North America intensifies the challenge. Merrick explains, “Our mission is to provide our guests an extraordinary experience. To accomplish this, we are looking for people who have service acumen, but every job has a different set of behavioral requirements and motivating factors to do that job well. The challenge is developing a selection process that can handle the large number of hires, diverse roles and support the corporate directive of exceptional customer service.”

As part of Merrick’s new HR strategy to address this issue, a formal hiring process was put in place which included structured interviews and a behavioral assessment component. During his tenure at the Fontainebleau Resort in Florida, Merrick experienced strong success using the Predictive Index® (PI®) behavioral assessment to optimize his selection efforts. Merrick strongly believed PI could similarly support the Canyons’ hiring process. Working with PI Worldwide Member Firm, Oliver Group, Merrick presented the PI to his senior team at Canyons Resort which included the executive team and all functional and operational heads. Based on its scientific accuracy and ease to administer, they all recognized the value PI could deliver in stabilizing the hiring process. Merrick was impressed with the companion tool to the Predictive Index, the Performance Requirements Options™ (PRO), which allowed the Canyons to develop behavioral profiles for specific jobs, allowing for a fit/gap analysis between the candidate and the job. Merrick explained to the senior team, “If we want to establish a strong service culture, we need the Predictive Index to take the guesswork out of the hiring process.” The decision to bring in the Predictive Index was unanimous.

To streamline the application process, the Canyons incorporated the PI directly into their HRIS (Human Resource Information System) using PI Worldwide’s *accessPI-Connect™*, which allowed for a seamless integration with their online job application process. Merrick says, “Predictive Index is able to handle the volume that we need. It’s relatively easy to train and understand. The flexibility of the assessment tool allows us to be able to match the right person to that job through the job PRO tool, no matter what the position is.”

IMPLEMENTATION

Merrick decided to take a subtle approach to implementing the Predictive Index within the organization; let the tool speak for itself. Working with the department managers and the HR team, the Canyons developed PRO job models for each role but did not require managers to adhere to the PI/PRO fit analysis during the hiring process. Merrick and his team reviewed the PI results with the hiring managers, providing key behavioral insights on the motivations and drives of potential employees, current employees and offered input into the team dynamics which would often make hiring recommendations clear. In the end, the decision to hire would still be up to the manager. Those who heeded Merrick’s recommendations based on the behavioral insights saw a positive difference right away in the levels of employee performance and satisfaction. For example, Merrick recalls, “The manager [of lift operations] hires about 180 people per season. After using PI for a season she stated the people that were recommended by the HR department based on their PI results delivered a more consistent and stronger performance.”

During the strategic budget meetings at the end of the first year of using the Predictive Index, Merrick pointed out to the senior management team that they were at the beginning stages of using PI and only

starting to see the impact that PI could have at the Canyons. Greg mentioned that if they were going to make a switch to another tool, now was the time. He shared the response: "Around the room, it was 100% consensus that PI was definitely the right tool for the Canyons. In fact, there was a strong need to push it more deeply into the organization. We absolutely have full buy-in at the senior level."

The second season allowed the Canyons to expand their use of PI to the many areas of the resort, helping to develop a common language around workplace behavior, communication and performance. Greg shares that "as we went into the second season those early adopters became much more adamant about using PI in their everyday people practices and requested to become certified in the Predictive Index. They wanted to know more about it. This excitement built momentum for the tool. We had that second wave of individuals who were using the insights from PI along with the management interview to make sure the job fit was correct."

RESULTS

More and more managers were embracing and relying on PI to drive good people decisions. One of the benefits of being a highly seasonal business is the ability to formally evaluate the past season and develop a plan for the following year. Year two was the period when the new HR-driven initiatives to support the mission of "guiding their guests to an extra ordinary experience through exceptional service" could be examined at a number of different levels. The results are even more impressive given the season being evaluated was the driest Park City had seen since 1970. Greg shares, "Everything tastes better when it's snowing, meaning everyone loves your resort more when there is a hunk of snow dumped on it."

In looking at the results, Greg could not be happier: "We knew we were doing something better at the Canyons since it was clearly not the snow this year. The numbers proved it."

2011 Metrics for Canyons Resort

Part of the North America Ski Resorts

- *Employee Service levels grew to a high of 9.6 out of a 10 point scale.*
- *#1 for Employee Friendliness - no other ski resort in North America outperformed the Canyons. They were always a Top 10 Resort but after implementing several new processes including Predictive Index, they achieved the rank of #1.*
- *Net Promoter Score which measures customer loyalty, went from the low 60s to the 70s.*
- *Return Rate of seasonal employees grew to 64% from 42% from the previous year, a testament to the impact on employee engagement levels when placed in the right jobs.*
- *Retention rate of permanent employees is at 70%, an unheard of figure in the hospitality industry.*
- *Voted #1 Best Place to Work in Utah based on an independent survey completed by employees. The results also showed very high levels of employee satisfaction and engagement in contributing to the resort's success.*

One of the reasons the Predictive Index was chosen as their assessment tool of choice was the broad applications of the tool beyond selection. Today it is used as a management tool for improved employee development and as part of the performance process. Greg explains: "We wanted a personality

assessment tool that we could use for better people practices. We use PI for performance management; when we need to find out a bit more about a person we revisit their PI results for that additional insight.” Under Greg’s leadership, the Canyons will continue to grow its use of the Predictive Index as a strategic employee development tool.

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