

POSITIVE TIPS FOR THE JOB MARKET

HELP WANTED

Staffing Difficulties in Resort Towns

By: Paul Zilligen

With the busy summer tourism season winding down quickly into the fall shoulder this is a good time to reflect on the staffing difficulties faced by tourism industry employers, especially in resort towns.

Resort towns like Banff and Whistler rely heavily on seasonal influxes of workers to fill entry level positions in hotels, restaurants, site seeing attractions, retail shops and more. These housekeepers, servers, and ticket agents are the backbone of tourism related services in resort towns and are hot commodities, especially during the bread and butter months for tourism. Like any market where there is higher demand than supply, the job market in resort areas is competitive. Young workers first arriving in a town may be in a hurry to find a job and a place to live but once settled the shopping often begins. The high cost of living, low wages, and staff accommodation conditions provide the incentive for many workers to look for preferred places of employment. One worker may move through several jobs in just a few short months before leaving town for further travels or to head home again. This pattern of seasonal labour shortages and staff instability can be costly for resort businesses that are trying to maintain a world class standard of service.

Tourism based businesses in resort towns have been combating their staff difficulties for years with small bonuses, subsidized staff housing, employee recreation programs, and slight increases in entry level wages. Unfortunately, these incentives have not stabilized the labour market. This past summer saw record staff shortages and record low unemployment levels.

One area of promise that may offer a measure of stability to the labour market of resort towns are foreign workers. Individual employers and industry groups have been making slow in-roads to unraveling the red tape surrounding foreign worker recruitment. Of course, young travelers with one year working holiday visas have been relied upon heavily for years as a staffing resource. However, these young travelers cannot offer the stability of foreign workers hired directly to a single employer for the duration of their visa.

Increasingly tourism businesses in resort towns have been turning to a staffing resource that the corporate world and the construction industry has utilized for years; employment agencies. With a full-time focus on human resources and major recruitment networks to access, employment agencies offer tourism businesses an opportunity to spend less time on staffing woes and more time on their core functions. Resort area employers have discovered that an employment agency can offer both a short-term temp during a crunch time and a permanent hire for a key position when in-house recruitment limitations are experienced. Employment agencies are bringing another piece to the stability puzzle and are demonstrating the worth of their service fees in terms of efficiency gains, revenue increases, customer satisfaction, and more.

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