

Skills, Not Jobs

As business owners adapt to smaller and more agile workforces, the idea of fixed 'jobs' is becoming less productive for workforce management and general operations. Increasingly, employees are being cross-trained to cover multiple positions, which has implications for hiring, training, and retention. Taking careful stock of the skills needed, rather than the job titles involved, is a good starting point for re-imagining the tourism workforce.



A JOB IS...

A static description of the main tasks, grouped together under a recognized name (e.g., Front Desk Agent, Tour Guide, Line Cook)



A SKILL IS...

A developed capacity to apply knowledge to accomplish a specific task (e.g., managing reservations through an online system, developing an itinerary, preparing and cooking meals)

Jobs are useful proxies for roles and responsibilities, but they're not always up-to-date on what employees actually do, or the skills they need to succeed. Job requirements change over time, sometimes rapidly: most tourism jobs today require more advanced computer and technology skills than they would have even ten years ago. And as businesses develop new products and services, the skills needs of the organization will also develop in new directions.



Focusing on skills instead of traditional job roles will help you attract new talent, and capitalize on the untapped talent already in your organization.

- Consider the skills that applicants bring with them, not just their immediately relevant experience. Existing skills are the foundations on which new skills can be developed.
- Tailor work plans and job offers to match the employee's strengths and interests. Restructuring jobs and redistributing responsibilities to match the applicants and employees in front of you can help you do more with fewer people.
- Which core skills are important across your organization? This can help identify where to focus cross-training efforts.
- Talk to your existing staff about their hidden skills and talents. The perfect candidate for a new position might already be working for you.
- Which skills are essential to the job to start with, and which can be trained up over time? Getting this right can widen the pool of strong candidates.



HIDDEN GEMS

When thinking about workplace skills, it's easy to focus on a narrow range of specific tasks and technical competencies. But in a people-oriented business, generalist and social skills are incredibly valuable – and much harder to train.

- Specific cultural knowledge and language abilities
- Empathy and social awareness
- Creativity and problem-solving

When thinking about transferrable skills, consider equivalencies developed outside of tourism. Someone with a close match from another sector or industry may require less training than you think.

Figuring Out What You Need

Changing gears from thinking about 'jobs' to thinking about 'skills' can take a bit of mental flexibility.

For some positions, it might not be necessary – but if you're having trouble attracting or retaining people, rethink how your positions, roles, and responsibilities are structured: tweaking can make things run more smoothly.

These prompts are intended to help you consider your hiring needs through a different lens. Discover Tourism has a number of other resources that you may find helpful in managing your workforce.

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| Skills audit: What skills do you already have in-house that you don't know about? | Talking to your existing staff about their skills, interests, and ambitions sends a strong signal that you value their time and commitment to your business, and that you want to support their personal and professional growth. It can also identify where to offer more training, and suggest paths to promotion or transfers that will make the best use of the talent you already have. | | |
| For each employee, skills and interests they're not using in their current position | New tasks or responsibilities they would like to take on | Skills they want to develop in the next year | |
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| For positions you're struggling to fill | Being clear about the skills and responsibilities associated with a position will produce a better job ad, and will help job-seekers better understand your expectations. It's also a good exercise in making sure that you really need all the things that you're asking for when you post the job. | | | |
| What are the minimum skills necessary for starting out? | What other skills would an ideal candidate have? | What skills can they get through training once they've started? | Which of my existing employees might be interested in this role? | |
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| Realigning roles and responsibilities | If you're struggling to fill a few positions, think about how you could redefine and reinvent those 'jobs'. Look for skills that cluster together, and link those clusters to the needs of your business. Moving some responsibilities from one position to another can also make things more interesting or appealing to job-seekers. | | | |
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