

## **Training as Part of a Daily Approach to Business**

As Frontiers North Adventures has evolved and grown, its staffing and training requirements also have changed. A wildlife viewing tour organization, Frontiers North has grown from one staff when it opened in 1987 to 12 fulltime and up to 35 term positions today.

“Staff training is an important part of the company, as much of what we do is very detailed and specific to our company procedures and booking program,” explains Lynda Gunter, owner of Frontiers North. “Training may be less formal, but that works for us because we’re a small enough company and we’ve developed our reservation and data system and procedures specific to our own company.”

This means that rather than training an employee down to the exact details of a job, Gunter or another employee can help mentor an individual as he or she learns the position. Bringing skills learned at another travel company can be helpful, but they may be applied differently at Frontiers North.

Most of the staff has taken tourism courses at Red River College, or similar travel courses. They generally have experience in the industry as well. This means the training requirements are more to familiarize new staff with the company’s own reservation system and its products.

“It’s more a mentoring situation, learning about the company. We’ll have someone spend one-on-one time with a new person, focusing on our programs and our destinations and working through a computer reservation system that was created specifically for our company,” Gunter continues. “We expect people to ask for help. It’s part of the culture rather than a formal process.”

Staff evaluation and self-evaluation is an important facet of training in the sense that it allows employees to identify who and where they may want to, or need to, enhance their skills or knowledge level. Every staff member completes a core and technical competencies matrix as a self-assessment. This is combined with the employer review to establish objectives for the next performance period and to establish long-term goals.

“We use the SMART approach to performance review and developing objectives – specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and trackable,” says Gunter. “This means we have time-bound and realistic objectives.

The evaluation process allows for open dialogue. If the outcomes between the performance review and self-evaluation are considerably different, there is an opportunity to discuss and try to understand why there are these differences, and what can be done to ensure that both the staff member and the supervisor are comfortable with the results.

Thanks to Frontiers North providing a work environment that encourages open discussion, where training is less formal, relying more on a mentoring system, where staff has clearly defined expectations and the opportunity for self-assessment, the company continues to evolve as an organization that enjoys a healthy employee satisfaction and retention level.