
WORKFORCE CHALLENGES IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

Brief Introduction CV

I am a shift working/award wage earner. In 17 years as a full-timer, I have been given many varied opportunities over the years. I have worked as a

- Bus-boy - Atrium Restaurant - Burswood Hotel - 5.5 years;
- Room service Waiter – Burswood Hotel - 3 months;
- Recreation Attendant – - Intercontinental Hotel, Burswood 12 years.

I have also commented at a press conference to rally against Bed Tax (by request of the then General Manager Ulrich Kunzmann) – those comments were used on the ABC news to summarise the case against a Bed Tax: I have assisted as a Team Leader for Walk to Cure Diabetes activities for over ten years, written in the staff magazine; set-up, maintained and closed-down food and beverage functions, assisted guests with intra-state travel – down south, to Rottnest Island, and to many golf courses: Learned to coach tennis (Level 1 TCA Coach), run corporate tennis events, run school holiday tennis coaching clinics and tournaments at the resort and at club level, played social tennis and golf with guests, organised a staff golf day and assisted guests with accommodation (outside of Burswood) and suggested holiday activity and shopping schedules.

In 1997 I was recognised in the Western Australian Tourism Awards – “Sir David Brand Youth Medal” along with internal awards for “Runner-up Employee of the Year” and monthly “Achiever” and “Employee of the Month” awards.

As you can see, my “job” is really a lifestyle. The bonus experiences have had little to do with “Bussing”, “Waiting” and “Attending”. The various opportunities have all enhanced my work-life and added-value to my day-to-day Life.

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the discussion – “Workforce Challenges in the Tourism Sector”.

Key Issues in the Tourism Industry as I see them:

1. Skill shortages and weaknesses in appropriate back-up services for recruiting, training and retention of employees.
2. Labour shortages in meeting seasonal and event fluctuations.
3. Employment difficulties in regional and remote areas.
4. Supporting further employment opportunities and business growth.

1. Skill shortages and weaknesses in appropriate back-up services for recruiting, training and retention of employees.

The current skill shortages within the tourism industry are related to the general strength of the Australian economy that is creating many opportunities for people to work in a wide variety of roles in many industries.

a. Present Employee Shortages

- All trade workers
 - Skilled customer service workers with excellent communication skills.
- The continual ebb and flow of wealth through the local and world economy is presenting challenges to any low paying sector such as tourism.

b. Future Shortages

- Manual duties workers – skilled workers are being drawn to the remote mining areas, unskilled are gaining access to education and shunning manual duties;
- Guest service shift workers – as above;
- Casuals with flexible availability – busy study schedules and multiple casual jobs take any flexibility from casual workers;
- Tertiary educated full-time staff are attracted to higher paying industries.

c. Recruiting and Training deficiencies suggest that our sector must change to become a leader in offering increasingly innovative workplace solutions by

- Attracting mature age workers with 1-2 short shifts per week;
- Allowing income without affecting senior's benefits, pensions and superannuation;
- Attract stay at Home parents;

Create new work shifts during school hours - 9.30 to 2.30pm;

Create work-ready staff with school training programs.

Use technology to communicate to young workers - *Text* and email shifts and rosters and other workplace information.

Offer lifestyle friendly hours to young workers.

d. Lack of flexibility in working rosters to meet high and low season demands throughout the economy suggests that a non-traditional approach to rostering be adopted.

e. There is a culture gap in the Australian workforce towards being in the service industry – a "service-culture gap."

A service-attitude is not a concept boys and girls engender. They do not see "service" as a worthwhile or rewarding future profession. Many adults have similar prejudices.

f. Planning for future growth of tourism in Australia

- Allow greater flexibility for wage negotiation with safety-net provisions.
- Employers to build strong Teams and individual relationships to keep staff.

Summary of Recommended Strategies

Create a vision for the future tourism worker wanted by the industry. What range and level of skills does the industry want for the future? Is the industry prepared to change? Can the industry create a satisfactorily skilled - multi-skilled worker? Is it time to create a "Utility" tourism worker? A professional who can cook, compute, serve, clean, promote and supervise as need be.

Develop a Nation-wide program with industry recognition and pay scales to match this Para-professional-tradesperson worker role.

Retention of this newly skilled worker and other workers comes down to open communication between managers and workers and skilled human resource management. Quite simply, some

Managers may benefit from improving their communication skills and offering more compliments to workers

2. Labour shortages in meeting seasonal and event fluctuations.

a. Present and future employee shortages

- Trades workers – general shortage exacerbated by high demand in mining.
- Skilled customer service workers – Service professionals are rare.
- Casual flexibility – more than ever casuals are tied-up with other commitments. These restrict their ability to respond at short notice.

b. Recruiting and Training deficiencies

- Employers with excess capacity, set-up a sector human resource co-operative to permit the distribution of labour resource where required;
- Reduce fluctuations in workforce demands.
Establish a *cycle of events* - a steady flow of events, festivals, and new attractions periodised through the seasons in each region will reduce workforce peaks and troughs.
- Promote work on the web
Tourism Worker Website aussietourismwork.com;
Let a worker: workplace database website become a focal point for tourism workers seeking jobs in the industry all year-round;

c. Lack of flexibility to meet seasonal demands

- A centralised Tourism Worker "Association" could offer a pre-arranged "Work Tour" package of employers to tourism workers.
- ANZAC Tourism Worker Trade Agreement - Negotiate a free trade visa agreement with New Zealand to assist seasonal workforce fluidity between the countries per season.
- **Culture gap in the Australian workforce towards being in the service industry**

If the tourism industry could promote the benefits- the diversity, the fun, the relationships, the experiences - all to be gained from working in this sector – then the focus will be shifted from low pay to interesting people, new experiences and lots of opportunities.

d. Future growth of tourism in Australia

Changes to the award structure may lead to a growth in the number of people who consider providing services in the tourism sector. Growth in tourism may require flexible pay structures. Consideration could be given to offering differing rates during peak and off-peak seasons to reflect the changing supply and demand of labour.

Summary of Recommended Strategies

The changing nature of the economy suggests that the tourism sector should evolve to become an adaptable, coordinated and cooperative industry. With solid industry and government planning, career tourism workers could move to provide services where ever and whenever they are demanded.

A more concentrated and lengthened season of events, **relaxed ANZAC worker arrangements** and attractive wages and/or conditions will assist to promote employment opportunities and create more even seasonal labour workers.

3. Employment difficulties in regional and remote areas.

Introduce private incentives and public measures to encourage long-term economic development

- Regional and Remote (Tourism) Business Cooperative Create a *diversified* tourism co-op through multiple regions. Spread the seasonal risk of single operators by combining all financial and human resources, and improve cross-promotion, work-force flexibility during peak and off-peak seasons, and business process efficiencies; Spin-off successful businesses following a supervised incubation period.
- HECS credits - University students given structured work in regional and remote areas in exchange for HECS refund.
- Deregulate shopping hours;
- Creation of a "season" of cultural, sporting festivals through the regions.
- Employ locals to plan and develop aboriginal trails as seasonal long, medium and short walking trails. Provide educational signage and various levels of accommodation from huts to B&B's (if passing nearby townships), then market the attraction to European, Asian markets etc. At some destinations include dance theatre, art workshops, hunt demonstration, story telling, camp fire cooking – a real show and unique Australian experience!

Summary of Recommended Strategies

Offering HECS credit incentives to university students in exchange for a period of work and travel in regional and remote Australia may assist in the provision of labour, modern expertise and cultural exchange in regional and remote areas. The focus of this "internship" would be to create unique services in these areas that would attract and service tourists of the future – and give locals the skills to operate and duplicate the service in future.

4. Supporting further employment opportunities and business growth.

Employment Opportunities

- Worker Exchange Programs – Employer to employer agreements – employees and employers negotiate through a *Tourism Worker*
- Couples work – allow couples to share fortnight hours of a single roster;
- Attract Seniors by allowing work without penalty to their benefits or superannuation;

Business growth

- Workers earn a share of profits;
- Variable tax rates for start-up businesses
- Tourism industry offer wholesale rates to industry workers;
- Promote, promote, promote.

Summary of Recommended Strategies

Create a workplace that can provide a worker with multiple employment options, accommodating working schedules and full entitlements.

Conclusion

The workforce challenges facing the tourism industry are common to all other industries. Labour is in short supply. Being labour intensive, the industry requires plenty of willing workers – youthful and experienced - to cover a multitude of roles servicing the needs of local, interstate and international guests.

“So...Where the bloody hell are they?”

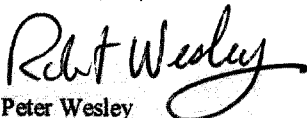
Tourism may need to adapt work practises and provide additional incentives to attract recruit and retain workers... I also believe that the general workforce requires a change in attitude - a cultural shift to accept guest service as a worthwhile and satisfying career.

As new and emerging markets compete for the tourism dollar – it becomes increasingly difficult to rely on picturesque locations, attractions, and events to attract tourists. What sets Australia apart? Water is everywhere. Desert? Blue skies? Rain forest....No. What sets Australia apart from all the others is the quality of the people: The tourism workers.

Workers in the tourism industry are the cast in the “Welcome to Australia Show”. Everyday curtains open at dawn – from that moment forward “we” are responsible for the many moments of truth experienced by the guest through the day. We are empowered to show interest, to care and to share our authentic Australian experiences. Guests enjoy the sights, smells, tastes and sounds - but the most tangible memories are the relationships forged and the knowledge shared between workers and guests.

PS. I HAVE ENJOYED THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THINK ABOUT WAYS TO ATTRACT MORE PEOPLE TO MY PROFESSION. IF THE IDEAS EXPRESSED IN THIS RESPONSE CREATE INTEREST - THEREBY REQUIRING FURTHER DEVELOPMENT - I WOULD BE VERY KEEN TO VISIT THE STANDING COMMITTEE. IN CANBERRA, I COULD THEN REFINE AND IMPROVE THE IDEAS WITH THE COMMITTEE'S EXPERTISE.

THANKYOU



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