

CASE STUDY:

## Aquila Tours

### Ensuring that Work & Learning are Fun

Aquila Tours is a tour operator based in Saint John, New Brunswick with nearly 30 years' experience in the tourism industry. After recognizing that its business growth is strongly correlated with the growth and development of its employees, Aquila Tours strengthened its learning opportunities for employees.

Aquila President Beth Kelly Hatt recognized that there was a direct correlation between the personal growth of her team members and the business growth of the company. Kelly Hatt has made learning and teambuilding core elements of Aquila's operations. She has infused the company with a spirit of learning, mentoring, and teamwork that has served it well ever since.

As a result, the company has enjoyed strong business performance and high employee satisfaction and retention. Core objectives in developing employees are to find, keep, and develop "the right people for Aquila's team" in order to improve their contribution "to the success of both the team and the company."

#### Learning activities:

Motivated by the goal of improving

professional skills and knowledge and personal development and satisfaction, Aquila Tours offers formal and informal learning opportunities for employees. Employees participate in industry learning, and the company holds regular teambuilding events and workshops that contribute to the development of employees' industry knowledge and enhanced team spirit. Less formally, the company supports a variety of mentoring activities.



In the last two years, this has involved mentoring two key team members as part of a succession planning process designed to ensure the health and growth of the company. Consistent with Aquila's philosophy of teambuilding and team empowerment, the company takes special efforts not only to share all company information with all employees, but also to include them

in the development of budgets, business and marketing plans, annual reports, and other strategic documents.

Two features of Aquila's approach to learning and development stand out:

- Treat every business activity and decision as an opportunity for learning and exchange.
- Ensure learning is directly relevant to real business objectives. Employees learn what they need to know and apply it in the face of real business challenges and decisions.

***"Treat every business activity and decision as an opportunity for learning and exchange."***

#### Key results:

Every year since 1994, the company has increased profits, even during tough times for the tourism industry as a whole. The firm has maintained very good employee retention rates. Turnover is "very small", something that is particularly challenging in an industry that relies to a large extent on part-time, seasonal labour.