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## Sheraton Casino/Hotel

### Employees trained in basic life skills to improve retention

“When people leave, it’s not because they can’t do the job, but because they can’t manage themselves and how they interact with others,” says Carolyne Park-Pegram, training manager and employee counselor of the Sheraton Casino/Hotel in Tunica, Mississippi.

The Tunica Sheraton had trouble retaining employees such as maids, food and beverage staff, and cage cashiers. Because these entry-level employees also are frontline employees, they play an important role at the Sheraton.

“Frontline jobs are often the ones that most affect customer service and satisfaction, because they are guest-contact positions or support guest comfort,” Park-Pegram explains, noting, “and in Tunica, the workforce presented special challenges that affected our achieving these objectives.”

### Breaking out of their field

Because agriculture has long been the mainstay in Tunica, much of the city’s workforce had never been exposed to the structure and work habits of business and industry. For many, their Sheraton casino or hotel job is the first they have held outside of farming.

“Many of our new employees were field workers and were not used to a regular and more structured work environment,” Park-Pegram explains.

Their lack of basic skills and experience working in a structured environment—plus the 24-hour, seven-day-a-week demands of the gaming business—resulted in high turnover. Jim Zompa, the Sheraton’s vice president of human resources, chose to address the problem with a special program focused on employee retention.

“I hired Carolyne Park-Pegram, who had experience with work incentive programs for the state, to build retention,” Zompa explained, adding: “We identified the need, hired Carolyne, and then found the right tool—AchieveGlobal’s WorkSkills training.”

AchieveGlobal's WorkSkills: Steps To Your Success provides critical communication skills and work ethic behaviors that are basic to employment. The training accelerates workers' job maturity by defining work ethic, building listening and communication skills, presenting ways to cope with change and diffuse anger, and developing cooperative, collaborative attitudes.

The Tunica Sheraton team worked with AchieveGlobal to customize WorkSkills' seven modules to meet the needs of new employees as well as meet the specific workplace needs of the casino/hotel business. The modular training, deliverable in two-hour sessions, also minimized time away from the job.

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"The WorkSkills program

presented new opportunities for economic and emotional self-sufficiency among several hundred young and older adults."

— Calolyne Park-Pegram

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**The plan: measurable results**

Park-Pegram and Zompa initiated the program to build retention at the Tunica Sheraton with a pilot designed to yield measurable results. New employees were divided into two groups, a pilot group and a control group. Two counselors were hired to provide up to six counseling sessions during the first year of employment for both groups.

Yet only the pilot group received training in "Life Skills," the Sheraton's customized version of WorkSkills. The seven modules they completed are:

1. **Five Basic Principles**, which focuses on work and home behaviors that affect relationships.
2. **Getting the Information You Need**, which teaches communication skills, including how to ask basic questions about the job and job tasks.
3. **Positive Response to Change**, which addresses coping with work, people and position changes.
4. **Speak With Confidence**, which teaches employees to speak clearly, including how to ask questions to clarify job assignments.
5. **Anger Diffusion**, which addresses how to deal with conflict at home and in the workplace.
6. **Teamwork**, which teaches teamwork and sharing in the entire work environment, not just in the department.
7. **Handling Life Outside Work**, which defines real vs. perceived emergency situations to help employees avoid absenteeism.

### Staying power ... and more!

Within six months, the retention rate of the pilot group exceeded the retention rate of the control group by 23 percent. As Zompa observed, “The individuals who participated in Life Skills training appear to be more focused on their job tasks and more determined to remain on the job.”

“Based on my experience directing job skills programs,” says Park-Pegram, “I think the AchieveGlobal training offers several key skills that make the difference between success and failure: dealing with change, anger management and communication.

“Another strong element of this training,” Park-Pegram continues, “is that it builds self-esteem, changing the way people see themselves. They feel more valued, more capable.”

Park-Pegram adds that the approximately 200 new employees who have been trained so far are in-house ambassadors for the work ethic and positive behavior, setting good examples for other employees. The trained employees also have become an informal support group, helping one another cope and asking managers to intervene when a co-worker is having problems.

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“These people face so many barriers in their lives and this training helps them overcome those barriers.”

— *Calolyne Park-Pegram*

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Managers at the Sheraton also have taken the training, and Park-Pegram is certified to facilitate it. She also is one of the employee counselors, so the Sheraton has a self-sufficient, in-house program.

As part of the project measurement and in addition to management’s tracking of employee retention, trained employees were surveyed. The results? AchieveGlobal training has:

- increased employee productivity and communication
- engendered grassroots leadership at the front line of customer service
- improved working relationships with co-workers and managers
- increased employee job satisfaction

Beyond retention, an added result is that many employees have become more loyal to the organization.

Park-Pegram and Zompa achieved their objective of solving the Tunica Sheraton’s employee retention problem but—more than that—they’ve helped many new employees find themselves.

### About AchieveGlobal

AchieveGlobal is the world's leading resource for helping organizations translate business strategies into business results by developing the skills and performance of their people. We are a single resource for aligning employee performance with organizational strategy through training and consulting solutions in sales performance, customer loyalty, leadership and teamwork.

We work with organizations in a wide range of industries—in both U.S. and global implementations—and serve more than 400 of the Fortune 500 companies and more than 400 of the European Financial Times 500. We welcome the opportunity to work with you, too. Call us today to learn what *we* do best, so you can stay focused on what *you* do best.



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