

People Make the Difference

OUTWARD BOUND

[TREVOR TAYLOR, CEO]



THE COMPANY *Since 1962 Outward Bound has been a provider of life-changing personal development programmes and self-discovery experiences. It has 40 employees at the school in Anakiwa in the Marlborough Sounds and 10 employees at its office in Wellington. More than 45,000 New Zealanders have completed Outward Bound courses. Outward Bound's operating revenue was \$4.36 million in 2004, up from \$3.8 million the previous year. But more importantly forward bookings are also up 30%. In February 2006 Outward Bound, out of 200 companies, was the overall winner at the Unlimited Best Places to Work Awards 2005.*

PRODUCTIVITY CHALLENGE

In the 90s, Outward Bound faced financial difficulties and management had to make a number of critical decisions to ensure the long-term survival of the organisation. A centralised approach to decision-making was adopted and while it ensured the survival of the organisation, it had a detrimental impact on the culture of the organisation and its productivity. Divisions between offices became entrenched. Employees resisted change and poor communication between different parts of the organisation impacted on the quality of the courses delivered.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

Outward Bound knew it needed to improve communication channels between the Board in Auckland, its head office in Wellington and the Anakiwa site. This was identified as a key strategy to create a more productive workplace. Says CEO, Trevor Taylor: "It was important to get the whole organisation moving in the same direction – from Board through to committee members, managers and delivery staff. Word-of-mouth is so important for an organisation like ours and our reputation depends on the quality of the courses. We had to invest in our people and their skill development."

While a number of changes related to enhancing the culture of Outward Bound, structural changes were also made to enable more direct contact between operational and managerial staff. Outward Bound has gone on to implement a raft of common sense

measures: the Wellington team get down to Anakiwa regularly; instructors are involved in the development of courses from the word go and recently conducted a major review of all courses; twice a year the entire staff get together; and the Board meets and stays overnight at Anakiwa at least once a year.

A more consultative approach to decision-making was introduced. There was a commitment to:

- involve employees in changes prior to a decision being made
- ensure Wellington Office staff understand what operational staff are able to deliver
- ensure management are consistent in the messages they give to staff.

A panel of management and operational staff was set up to evaluate new ideas and make recommendations on policies that needed to be put in place before implementing new ideas

on courses. Those who cannot attend the meetings are welcome to make submissions which are considered by the group. Says training instructor, Sekita-Ra Mennie: "Our input is valued and it makes us feel important."

It was recognised that an enterprise such as Outward Bound succeeds or fails on the strengths and qualities



Staff have a real stake in what happens here. Happy workers can do a good job for you.

*David Mangnall,
Training Manager
Outward Bound*



of its people. Operational staff are alone with course participants for 21 days. Management realised that this presents a real challenge, and the organisation must be willing to invest in its people and their skills. This means a commitment to recruiting the right people and investing in ongoing training.



The organisation has to be confident that new instructors have the right combination of technical and interpersonal skills. Candidates for instructor positions are put through an in-depth evaluation, which includes an assessment of their skills and experience, and a five-day appraisal programme. Successful candidates sign on for three years and undergo an extensive two-month induction programme.

During the induction programme the new recruit observes experienced instructors deliver an entire course, and receives competency training as required. The new instructor is then paired with an experienced instructor and begins to deliver courses for the first time. Peer mentoring occurs on the job and a full critique of performance is carried out at the end of the course. After four months it is expected the new instructor will have the skills to become a fully fledged instructor.

There is an ongoing focus on skill development for all Outward Bound instructors. Instructors usually work for around 200 days of the year and 20 of these

days are set aside for training. While most of these days are group training days, some days are dedicated to meeting the needs of the individual instructor.

KEY LEARNINGS

- In a people business, recruiting the right staff is crucial.
- Staff must be equipped with the right skills from the outset – you cannot assume that staff have all the required skills.
- Training delivers productivity gains for an organisation.
- There must be a strong commitment to communication throughout an organisation so that employees who are dealing with clients believe in the vision, and have the skills to pass it on.
- Although there are times for autonomous decision-making, a more consultative approach is likely to be more effective in building a team commitment and enhancing productivity.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

| Target group | Benefit | Value to the company |
|--------------|---|--|
| EMPLOYEES | Rigorous and comprehensive training Opportunities for ongoing professional and technical skill development Staff input on policy issues | Upskilled and highly competent staff Increased staff commitment to the company Improved policies and processes |
| MANAGERS | Recruiting the right people Investing in high-quality training Improved levels of communication | Reliable, professional staff Staff loyalty Improved decision-making |

BECOMING MORE PRODUCTIVE

Lifting productivity involves exploring all the ways that your workplace could do things better and smarter. No matter what your business does, or how big or small it is, there are a range of ways you can improve its productivity, including:

- Building leadership and management
- Organising work better
- Networking and collaborating
- Investing in your people and their skills
- Encouraging innovation and using technology to get ahead
- Creating workplace culture
- Measuring what matters.