Indian Gaming

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Once the decision is made to move tribal members up through the system, you need to figure out how are you going to do it. There is a variety of succession and mentorship programs in and out of Indian gaming, some have been successful and others not so successful. Some we looked at required participants to have college degrees.

We have over 5,000 tribal members living on the reservation and in the district I come from you can count the number college graduates on one hand. Other programs were more liberal but contained requirements and/or conditions that participants were held to.

If you told tribal members you were going to offer a way for them to climb the management ladder but in order to do so they needed to meet certain conditions, you would cut a number of them off before they could get started and turn a number of them off because they would feel they needed to prove themselves before they got into the pro-

That sounds scary, but there was more bark than bite. Many tribal members do not want the responsibility and accountability that comes with being a manager. Making the only condition the desire to become a manager allows the Band member to make the decision.

A demand to make tribal members managers is only as good as their desire to become managers. In addition, those members who wish to try the program and find that they do not have the ability or the real desire to become a manager need to have a way out. In our case we chose to give them the option to self demote back to their former position.

We formed a pool of applicants by inviting them by letter. Every Band member employee, of whom there are 400 total, was sent a letter inviting their participation. 89 responded positively and 53 actually showed up. Many of those who responded negatively stated their reason for not wanting to participate, which included not wanting to become one of “them” or not wanting the responsibility or accountability of a manager. Still others wanted to see if we would deliver what we said we would.

Curriculum development is important; you do not want to place them in situations they are not equipped to handle. We decided to put them through six months of classroom experience before placing them in departments. We also decided to start with six participants from the pool and add six new ones every six months, spacing them six months apart in their training cycles. Our concept was six months of classroom training followed eighteen months of departmental training.

Classroom training was based upon the skill need for each participant and set concepts from our in-house Management 101 course and each participant’s basic skill level was assessed. If the skill could not be taught in the first six months, part of the day when they were to be in departments was devoted to skill development. While in a department, goals and objectives were developed. Diaries were kept

MENTORING PROGRAMS

Elevating Tribal Members: Succession and Mentorship Programs

by Bruce Baird

Tribal gaming was intended to be an economic boon for tribes and it has for some. Tribes both large and small have benefited economically from gaming but many tribes feel short changed when it comes to employment in their own casinos. Granted, some of the smaller tribes with smaller populations cannot field the kind of workforce needed to man a casino. However, even tribes with large populations do not employ as many of their members as they would like. This is especially true in management positions.

The skill levels of reservation residents, especially in the more remote areas, average lower than in urban areas. The lack of skills has relegated many of them to the lower-paid positions. There are members who have the skills and ability to become managers but lack the training. Basic skills classes, succession and mentorship programs are three ways to provide avenues for tribal members to move up the chain.

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A demand to make tribal members managers is only as good as their desire to become managers. In addition, those members who wish to try the program and find that they do not have the ability or the real desire to become a manager need to have a way out. In our case we chose to give them the option to self demote back to their former position.

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and gone over weekly to see if the goals were met and whether they received assistance while in that department. Their diaries were reviewed each week in order to keep close tabs on their progress and to determine if they were receiving the necessary assistance in the departments.

The succession program participants will be prepared for any second level management position and, in some special cases, upper management. The mentorship program is similar to the succession program. While the succession program is preparation for variety of positions, the mentorship program is for single positions only.

When we decide that we are going to open up a position for mentorship, we establish a job opening advertisement rather than mailing to all tribal members. The position is listed as a mentor position and for Band members only. The manager in the position is a non-Band member and an understanding is reached with them that they will train a Band member to take their place and the length of training may be two years, after which the non-Band member will leave.

The mentor and the trainee will develop goals and objectives and time lines for the position. The trainees keep diaries similar to the succession participants, which are also read weekly.

The retention rate is very high for both programs and we feel confident that we can obtain the tribal council’s goal of employing 80% of our management positions with Band members.

Bruce Baird is Gaming Director for Leech Lake Gaming. He can be reached by calling (218) 335-7503 or email bruce.baird@leechlakegaming.com

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