

Optimance and Gen InsYght Help WinStar Hire and Train 1,500 People in Record Time

Multi-generational campaign creates programs and incentives to ensure low long-term turnover and ideal mix of workers

INDUSTRY

Hospitality and gaming

COMPANY PROFILE

Based in Thackerville, Okla., WinStar World Casino sits just 1 mile inside the Oklahoma border. WinStar is owned and operated by the Chickasaw Nation, which relies on its income to provide essential services such as health care, education and transportation services.

SITUATION

WinStar wanted to celebrate New Year's Eve with a grand opening expansion celebration. To do this, the casino had to attract, hire and train 1,500 new employees. What's more, WinStar wanted to ensure its workforce would remain stable over time, with reasonable turnover rates.

RESULTS

With the support of Optimance Workforce Strategies, and its sister company Gen InsYght, WinStar met its hiring and training goals in only seven months. It also enjoyed a more than 30% reduction in turnover and increased morale. The casino launched fully staffed and on-time, while offering the programs and incentives to ensure low long-term reduced turnover and an ideal mix of workers.

Filling a large roster

The Chickasaw Nation planned to open Oklahoma's largest casino on New Year's Eve, just in time to ring in 2009. In addition to several gaming areas, the facility would include a 395-room hotel, concert center, an inn, an RV park, an 18-hole golf course and several restaurants.

The casino complex required 1,500 employees, each of whom needed to be screened, hired and trained in a matter of months. This would more than double the current WinStar workforce, which at the time numbered just 1,400. In addition, the existing human resources department included only eight team members, who already had their hands full taking care of current employees.

The Chickasaw Nation hired the highly experience human resource consultants at Optimance Workforce Strategies, and its sister company Gen InsYght, to focus on effective hiring and training of their new workforce. The Optimance/Gen InsYght team developed a three-step process for WinStar: recruiting, retention and motivation.

Seeking special candidates

When WinStar began the hiring process, the company was focused on the Chickasaw Nation's special requirements. For example, hiring managers at WinStar do not have to comply with Federal or State labor laws. They must, however, maintain preferential hiring toward members of the tribe. This means that Chickasaw candidates had to be considered first and hired if they met minimum qualifications – even if they were not the best candidates. The governor of the Chickasaw Nation required a weekly report showing how many people were hired and reasons if any were turned down.

The casino's location created another hiring challenge, since it is located more than one hour away from the major population centers of North Texas.

"At the time, gas was close to \$4 a gallon," said Sherri Elliott-Yearly, CEO of Optimance Workforce Strategies and Founder of Gen InsYght. "It was difficult to convince candidates to drive more than an hour from Dallas or Denton."

In addition, Gen InsYght recommended that WinStar create a multi-generational hiring strategy. This would create long-term stability, plus help the casino gain the benefits of working with a more age-diverse workforce.

Gambling on the generations

A relatively new and specialized strategy in the human resources arena, multi-generational hiring addresses the changing demographics of our nation's workforce, Elliott-Yearly said. She divides the workforce into four generations: traditionalists (ages 65-87), boomers (ages 45-64), Xers (ages 29-44) and millennials (ages 16-28).

"Each of these generations has something special and positive to add to the workplace," Elliott-Yearly said. "For example, workers in their 60s tend to be reliable, hard-working and dedicated. They can provide much-needed leadership to the younger generations."

TESTIMONIAL

While we have a terrific team at our WinStar location, the sheer volume of candidates we needed to source and the lack of resources available required us to seek assistance from an organization with experience in the recruiting and sourcing arenas. Since the Chickasaw Nation, Division of Commerce has had a long partnership with Optimance, we sought their expertise.

Optimance reviewed and made positive changes to our reporting and hiring process and maintained an open dialogue with our management team that made the process run much smoother.

This has been a terrific relationship that embodies the true spirit of partnership and mutual commitment. I would strongly encourage any organization looking for assistance in any aspect of HR and recruitment to review the talents of the Optimance team.

Jennifer Kaneshiro, PHR
Chief HR Officer
Chickasaw Nation, Division of Commerce

“Millennials, on the other hand, are ready and willing to work 24/7,” she added. “They are technologically savvy and love to collaborate. When we bring together all the generations under one roof, the entire organization benefits.”

At the outset of the hiring blitz, the Optimance/Gen InsYght team determined the average age in each of WinStar’s departments. Why? Because if this age is too high, the department may be left without much-needed expertise and leadership in the coming years.

“It’s all about finding the right balance,” Elliott-Yearly said. “This is generational workforce planning, where experience is valued and youth is seen as an asset.”

Creating a magnetic attraction

As the recruiting process began, the Optimance/Gen InsYght team developed an approach that would appeal to candidates in all four generations. The firms developed an employer brand for WinStar, as well as consistent messaging that would be carried through all communications.

For the younger generations, they created a visually appealing, information-packed career web site. For more seasoned candidates, they overhauled printed recruiting materials. These included door-hangers distributed in residential areas, which would be sure to reach candidates of all ages. In addition, the company ran advertisements in local movie theaters and hired rolling billboards.

To overcome the distance barrier and reduce potential turnover, Optimance developed a gas program.

“Essentially, we paid the employees to drive to work,” Elliott-Yearly said. “They would net between \$25 and \$75 per paycheck, depending upon their zip code. This was one of our best recruiting tools, plus it improved morale over time. Yes, it was a big investment for Chickasaw. But it sure makes a big difference in keeping turnover low.”

Thanks to these programs, the entire 1,500-member workforce was in place and ready to work on opening day.

“This was a huge task that was completed in less than seven months,” Elliott-Yearly said. “Fortunately, when the doors opened, WinStar was confident it had the human resources deployed to succeed in the long term.”

Giving workers a reason to stay

Once the workforce was in place, the Optimance/Gen InsYght team launched a two-phase training program. At the outset, all employees were trained together and taught about communicating between the generations. Then, employees were broken into groups and trained in the most effective methods for their age groups.

After the business launched, Optimance continued taking actions to ensure turnover would remain low. This included focus groups with a wide mix of employees, who represented various departments and levels.

“Focus groups make employees feel valued, since someone is truly listening to what they have to say,” Elliott-Yearly said. “Plus, they’ve provided us with some of our most successful ideas for recruiting and a reduction of over 30% in turnover with increased morale.”