

Tomorrow's Workforce Award Entrant: Real Journeys



Otago/Southland-based tourism operator Real Journeys had encountered a challenge as growth in tourism visitors was putting pressure on the maritime industry's labour shortage.

At the same time the younger generation were not considering maritime as a choice of career, rather viewing it as seasonal employment and the chance to work in a unique environment.

The increase in demand was also negatively impacting the company's ageing workforce, a number of whom were fast approaching retirement and were inhibited in their ability to pass on their skills and expertise given the demands of the business.

The solution was to build a qualification pathway that saw Real Journeys' experienced and skilled employees providing a career that is desirable for the next generation. Real Journeys turned to training organisation Competenz.

The brief was to create a qualification pathway so that the next generation of maritime professionals could begin their careers with Real Journeys through innovative learning solutions while being supported by skilled and experienced employees. Real Journeys is a family-owned business, founded by Les and Olive Hutchins in Manapouri 60 years ago. The company employs 500 people and owns and operates 18 vessels offering sightseeing experiences in Fiordland, Queenstown and Stewart Island.

To capture the imagination of the younger generation, Real Journeys first had to understand where they were falling short as an employer of choice. So entered the classroom at Queenstown Resort College to gain feedback, brainstorm around solutions, and turn previous perceptions on their head.

Following these sessions, a 'Blockbuster Famil' was created to provide a realistic opportunity of what it was like to work behind the scenes at Real Journeys, resulting in over half of the attendees making formal expressions of interest to join the company.

Now that Real Journeys had created an opportunity to ignite the younger generation's drive to join the maritime industry, its next step was to ensure there was a pathway in place that they could follow.

Real Journeys Marine Manager Jon Clow told Competenz of the company's desire to grow its own talent with the longer-term objective of supporting the maritime industry and the local operators within local communities by addressing the labour and skills shortage issues head-on.

In Queenstown and Auckland Skype calls started happening, post-it note walls were appearing and whiteboard pens were working overtime as both parties defined the issue and came up with solutions.

Real Journeys had previous success customising qualifications with the industry training organisation Skills Active, and learned a lot from the projects successfully delivered. It also had a lot of internal capability, learning material and industry Standard Operating Procedures.

Competenz had successfully completed a maritime TroQ process (Targeted Review of NZQA qualifications), with the Navy and Fullers being key contributors. Their revised qualifications met Real Journey's perfectly, addressing maritime, health and safety and service requirements.

Within three months of engagement the two companies were working in partnership to define qualification pathways, customise learning material and assess existing competencies.

Real Journey's experienced operational leaders were heavily involved when it came to developing the company's first qualifications. Most of the leaders were able to produce their existing training manuals and materials and identify areas for development to make them better.

They also had a good feel for the type of learning styles their teams would respond to and this enabled Real Journey's People & Performance team to work with Competenz and meet NZQA requirements without the traditional look and feel of NZQA documentation.

This resulted in the leaders retaining ownership and not having to compromise on their desired learning outcomes.

Pathways were then mapped for the rest of the business, resulting in learning and qualification opportunities working in the areas of engineering, hospitality, transport, guiding, sales, administration and more.

More than 150 employees within the maritime operation have already accomplished the level 2 maritime qualification and are on the pathway to the next qualification. An additional 100 employees have achieved NZQA qualification in areas such as retail, tourism and adult education.

The company will be opening a training centre in Te Anau in August 2017 with maritime training opportunities on the lakes and fiords of the region. They hope that in the future they can support other operators facing the same issues with the supply of talented maritime professionals in order to address the national labour market shortage.

More qualifications will come next year, the next round of 'Blockbuster Famils' will run and more internal appointments will be made, and it is hoped that for employees Real Journeys will become a more rewarding experience both personally and professionally.

Real Journey's vision is to continue responding to feedback to improve its performance in learning and development, to enable it to become an employer of choice that can attract and retain the best people within the maritime tourism industry empowering them drive their own careers - and potentially one day drive a Real Journeys boat!