

Blackcomb Helicopters' Attraction and Retention Techniques with Fiona Cochrane

- **Is Blackcomb Helicopters currently affected by staffing shortages? If so, what actions are being taken to address/manage it?**
 - Moreso with qualified pilots, and heavily with hoist operators
 - Thinking outside the box and investing in our hires – if we can't find fully qualified individuals, how do we help get them where we need them to be?
 - Ex. Paying for endorsements, prioritizing quality training, designing our own in-house training programs (for Pilots that would be our recent purchase of a VR simulator, and for both pilots and hoist operators it would be our hydro course at the Pemberton base), etc.
- **Are there any programs in place to help retain current staff?**
 - Competitive total compensation package – extended health and dental, life insurance, AD&D, LTD, etc.
 - Long-term Incentive Program – employees receive a monetary bonus for hitting tenure milestones
 - Prioritizing mental health, family, work-life balance in general
 - Paying our employees year-round, despite being a highly seasonal operation
- **How does seasonality affect staffing levels and hiring practices? Are there incentives in place to encourage staff laid off during slower times to return for busier seasons?**
 - For our permanent, full-time employees, we use an overtime averaging agreement to allow our team to get a steady salary all year round, in an effort to retain our best talent
 - For our seasonal staff, we offer a version of our company “perks” such as Norco bike program, staff voucher program for BHLP service offerings, etc. upon the start of their second season
- **When advertising open positions or looking for potential candidates, are there any times when specific groups who may not have as much representation in the industry, such as women or indigenous people, be targeted or is a more general approach taken to attract as many qualified candidates as possible?**

- Currently, we cast a pretty broad net with our recruiting channels – Indeed, relevant Facebook groups (depends on the role, but based on location, skillset, student boards, etc.), school job boards, connecting with program heads of various schools, our own company website and social pages, and if-required, specialized recruitment agencies such as Red Seal focused recruiters
- **Coulson Aviation was recently approved by Transport Canada to provide in house training to AME-S students. This allows students to earn a salary while studying and provides the company with highly trained AMEs that are familiar with the company and its operations once fully qualified. I have noticed similar programs around the world including the Lufthansa Technik program for AMEs, Nav Canada’s air traffic control and flight service specialist programs, and Singapore Airlines’ pilot programs and coverage of university degrees. I would be curious to hear your thoughts about where this type of hiring might go in the future as it requires a lot of resources and trust in candidates.**
 - We are in the process of getting our Loft Dynamics Virtual Reality Simulator endorsed by Transport Canada, which will allow us to provide in-house training for our pilots on a huge range of work. Similarly, we will be able to have lower-hour pilots working and flying for our tourism offerings, while training for more advanced jobs like utility and firefighting.
- **I realize shift work and irregular hours come with the territory in aviation but I’m curious to know if this is something that Blackcomb Helicopters has considered when thinking about how to best support its employees?**
 - We have employees on every schedule imaginable – rotational shifts (eg. 2 on 2 off), 5x8 hour shifts, 4x10 hour shifts, varying part-time schedules, casual employees, etc. and we try to allow our employees to work schedules that work best for them, within reason of course. For some, the 2 on/2 off provides them with more work/life balance, while for others, being able to eat dinner with their families every night is a bigger priority.
- **Some of the research I have found recently talked about the stress that pilot’s face around losing their license due to health concerns. Are you aware of any resources available to staff members promoting a healthy lifestyle or for accessing mental and physical health services?**
 - Absolutely – we cover psychological visits under our extended health benefits including counsellors and social workers (a lot of company plans only cover

psychologists and psychiatrists), we have a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team for on-the-spot psychological support to our team members when critical incidents occur, we also provide employees (depending on the situation) salary top-up programs if they do require STD leave due to mental health or non-work related illnesses so they are incentivised to take time to recover when they need it.

- Thankfully being in the sea-to-sky corridor, the majority of our employees are avid outdoors people and are regularly exercising and getting into nature
- **With your experience in HR generally, are there any trends you have noticed to be effective in attracting and retaining staff as well as common things that candidates are looking for in a job?**
 - I think leadership is huge – when employees feel that they are being poured into, challenged, and they can see markable progressions in their own skillsets, they are going to be more engaged and loyal to the company. Empowering our managers to regularly take time away from day-to-day tasks to connect with their teams and develop them will be as important to people as compensation is
 - Candidate trends I notice are candidates looking for and valuing consistency and job security. I also hear a lot of employees eager to grow into supervisory roles, again tying into that leadership development from our current managers.
- **Do you have any experience working in other countries or industries? If so, how would they compare in terms of attracting and retaining staff and do you think many strategies would be transferable to the Canadian aviation market?**
 - We only have direct experience working in the US, which feels like an easier market to hire in given how much larger their overall labour force is... But this is an excellent point and something I should look into!