

A KEY HIRE: TRANSFORM YOUR CULTURE BY ADDING HUMAN RESOURCES

Photos Courtesy Deschutes & Dust Bowl



From creating a culture of ownership to establishing safety protocols and efficient onboarding processes, highlighting the need of how a Human Resources department can be transformative in building a resilient, and people-centric brewery. Investing in HR isn't just about managing employees — it's about empowering them and ensuring the long-term success of the organization, and as your brewery grows, working through the complexities of scaling not just operations but the need for dedicated HR support becomes evident.

One of Karen Tate's main responsibilities as Dust Bowling Brewing's owner was overseeing its personnel. That included recruiting, hiring, reviews, compliance, and more.

"When we hit about 100 employees, we knew it was time to create a dedicated HR team," Tate said. "We had a strong desire as a growing company to ensure we were utilizing the best HR

practices, staying in compliance, and creating an optimal work environment for our employees."

Dust Bowl's current HR department consists of two full-time staff members for just over 200 employees across the brewery, along with admin and four taprooms located throughout California.

"Together we have created a culture where our staff is comfortable reaching out to any of us with questions ranging from benefits to safety," she said. "This dedicated HR department allows our staff a 'safe' place to go with questions.

"Our attention to quality extends well beyond what we package; it's really rooted in how we engage with our staff to empower them, to help them feel great about where they are going to work every day."

Peter Skrbek, the CEO of Deschutes Brewery, said that adding an HR person is a key hire for any brewery owner.



"Add the HR role sooner than you think you need it and at least when you are packaging at scale for retail," he said. "All of our businesses are people-centric and prioritizing the people experience is critical to build the kind of culture and alignment needed for excellent results."

"There is also a need for the extremely important task of regulatory legal compliance regarding labor."

Skrbek said as an Employee Stock Ownership Program (ESOP) company, the HR team for Deschutes plays a pivotal role.

"Not only in administering that program but also in continuing to

build and foster our culture of ownership alongside leaders throughout our organization," Skrbek said.

When it came time to make that key hire, Tate said Dust Bowl looked for someone with a professional background and training in all the latest HR protocols and regulations. However, the most important qualification was the fit.

"Were they good with people? Did they have the ability to communicate clearly and hold people accountable? When you create a new department, it's vital to bring in someone more knowledgeable than yourself, someone who can add immediate value and respect to the



position," she said.

In their initial onboarding, they had the candidate meet with each department manager from the brewery and marketing department to accounting and taprooms.

"Understanding daily operations is a key component to an HR department's ability to support the company," she said. "They need to understand the challenges in each area and identify where the company may be most vulnerable for turn-over, injury, and such."

After making the hire, getting things taken care of that may have been too big of a project to tackle while wearing a multitude of hats meant doing important projects like updating the Employee Handbook was essential.

"Ensuring the expectations and protocols were clearly presented and accessible at all times was critical," Tate said of the update. "With these items clearly defined, it keeps any formal write-ups or terminations very professional, not personal in nature. It also allows easy access to information for the staff without going to the HR department every time they have a question come to mind."

They also integrated online application tools, including applicant assessment tools, which helped streamline the review process for managers. Also, once hired, Dust Bowl executed a formal onboarding process led by their new HR Coordinator ensuring all information is conveyed to a new employee in a thorough and consistent manner.

"As a company we also invest in the professional development of our HR team, ensuring they are up to date with all the latest tools,

technologies, and regulations applicable to our business," she said.

Over time, Tate said they have digitized all paperwork and utilized the Paycom app to execute and track all important personnel documents.

"This level of sophistication helps us to be more efficient and comprehensive," she said.

There are unique challenges that breweries face in HR compared to other businesses.

"On the brewery side, I would say safety is a critical area," Tate said. "Understanding the laws on rest breaks and meal breaks is also key for hourly staff."

"Our HR supports brewery and taprooms with safety training and the required safety binders at each location."

Onboarding, she pointed out, is the perfect opportunity to introduce a new employee to the culture of your company and set the tone for requirements on safety, breaks, and more.

Regardless, Tate stressed to not hesitate when contemplating this kind of hire, even if you start slow with part-time help.

"Having proper record keeping of manager to staff communications, clock in/clock out records, and such is imperative," Tate said. "While a dedicated HR manager is good for staff culture, it's even more important for the protection of the company."

"Even having a current employee take a SHRM training course and get certified is an excellent way to train staff in HR skills and requirements."

