



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE

South
of England

Commercial in Confidence

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE REPORT



Presented by Clive Tabiner

Investors in People Specialist

On behalf of Investors in People South of England

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Summary

Introduction

Established in 1976, Skern Lodge, located on the North Devon coast on the shores of the Taw and Torridge Estuary, provides education, learning and fun through adventure. They are licensed by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority to provide specified activities under the following headings: Watersports, Climbing and Trekking.

Their philosophy is simple. They want all of their guests to have fun and adventure, to learn something new and enjoy themselves safely. They strive to ensure that each guest receives individual attention in a relaxed, supportive and challenging environment. They provide services to a diverse range of customers; from schools and colleges, business training activities, packages for individuals, families and small groups, function and events.

This is a very successful business and continues to grow its client base, despite the challenging environment in which it operates, particularly when considering the pressures on budgets in the education sector – a main source of customers for Skern Lodge. Delivering excellent services which consistently meet clients' expectations is key to their continuing success. Skern Lodge was accredited as an Investor in People in 2003.

The report that follows includes many comments from your team members – it is their views that are important after all!

Overview of findings from this visit.

What a pleasure it is to meet the team at Skern Lodge! There is a real 'buzz' in the atmosphere here and your people are so enthusiastic about what they do and with how you deliver such excellent services for your customers. As one person commented: *"Skern is a great place – a fantastic place to work!"*

As we agreed, I focused on 4 themes during this visit:

1. Taking ownership for improving the business and in delivering customers' expectations.

You have a very motivated staff who recognise that a culture of continuous improvement is prevalent across Skern Lodge. People have a clear understanding of where your business is going and how they and their team will contribute to that. On an operational basis, regular, participative discussions within teams, involve everyone in driving improvement.

'Open door' management is part of everyone's experience; this encourages peoples' input and they feel their views are listened to and valued. Yours is a culture firmly grounded in respect and trust for colleagues; there is confidence in peoples' abilities and great support, which encourages people to take a lead in delivering improvements to your services.

Your team members show clear commitment and pride in Skern Lodge and what you all achieve, and this sustains a cycle of continuing improvement. Their contribution is recognised in many ways and this reinforces their commitment. People do feel valued here!

You also continue to improve how you support your team, through effective management and development.

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2. How well different teams work together to deliver a 'seamless' service.

Staff show good appreciation of how the efforts of each team contribute to the overall customer experience. There is definitely a sense of having a 'common purpose' across Skern Lodge. The meetings undertaken over the winter period have been very effective in strengthening that 'one team' ethos and approach, and people hope that engagement will continue.

Across teams, communication generally works very well; again, supporting a holistic approach to delivering your services. This approach is clearly reinforced by directors and your management team. Effective management support is a positive aspect of your organisation that everyone involved in this visit recognises and values.

3. How well new staff integrate into the Skern Lodge team.

Induction for new team members, both from the 'corporate' and team perspective, is very supportive and effective. Regular, constructive feedback for all staff plays an important role in helping people to continually develop their abilities.

4. Does the individualistic approach for supporting learning and development meet peoples' needs?

Team members appreciate the effort that you make to treat people as individuals and meet their particular needs, whether work related or personal. Your 'tailored' approach to supporting people's personal and professional development is seen to be a real strength, and one which really motivates people to take ownership of their own development and progressing their capabilities.

Managers ensure that outcomes from development activities are achieved and that rigour is welcomed; for example, ensuring that multi-skilling is developed to a consistently high standard. People recognise that your investment in their development is a key factor in the success that you have all achieved.

I have included some suggestions and ideas to support your continuing development, which are relevant to the 4 topics covered during this visit. These focus on:

- Communication across teams
- Developing your team
- Engaging staff in continuing improvement
- Recognising good performance.

Finally, I conducted a 'straw poll' with your team, who collectively gave you an average score of 9.2/10 as an employer – a very high score!

This first assessment visit to Skern Lodge has been a very enjoyable, interesting and informative experience. Many thanks to all those that took part in the conversations, to Barry for organising this visit, and for your very kind hospitality.



Clive Tabiner, Investors in People Specialist.

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Recommendation and next steps

Having carried out the review process in accordance with the guidelines provided for Investors in People Specialists by Investors in People – United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills, the Investors in People Specialist is totally satisfied that Skern Lodge continues to meet the requirements of the Investors in People National Standard. You also met 8 additional evidence requirements from the wider IIP Framework (see Outcomes table below). Many congratulations for your continuing achievement.

Investors in People accreditation is granted indefinitely, with a proviso that an interaction is undertaken within 18 months of accreditation and a full assessment takes place no greater than 3 years apart. Assessments can be undertaken at any time and more frequent assessments are recommended to maintain levels of good practice and continuous improvement. We will discuss your continuing strategy for using IIP at our Improvement Planning Meeting, scheduled for 11.00 am on Monday 13th April 2015.

Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire

Both the Investors in People Specialist and Investors in People South of England would welcome your feedback on this assessment and you will shortly be supplied with a Client Satisfaction Questionnaire from Investors in People to complete. Particular importance is placed on the feedback given by client organisations on Specialists; therefore we would very much appreciate it if you would complete the questionnaire.

Promoting continuous improvement

We support organisations at every stage of the Investors in People journey, helping them to realise the power of their people, optimise their performance and achieve their full potential. We see Investors in People as the People Partner for sustainable people solutions.

Please contact your Account Manager Veronica Parsons, on 07527 970404 or email Veronica.Parsons@iipsouth.investorsinpeople.co.uk to find out more about Investors in People and how we can help your organisation.

Details of the support available to you can be accessed by contacting Investors in People South of England via: - **T:** 020 7728 3456 **E:** enquiries@IIPsouth.investorsinpeople.co.uk
W: <http://IIPsouth.investorsinpeople.co.uk>

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Feedback from this visit

Please note; actual comments made by team members are given in italic type.

1. Taking ownership for improving the business and in delivering customers' expectations.

(Relevant to Indicators 1, 6, 7 & 10 of the IIP Standard and ERs 5.17, 5.24, 7.15, 7.16 & 7.19 of the wider Framework)

- Your staff are very motivated to contribute to planning for and driving forward with improvements to your business and how it operates. There is a culture within your team and across all departments that tries to find ways to do things better and to implement changes where needed. An 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' mentality certainly would be out of place here, at all levels in your organisation!
- Driving improvement requires a clear understanding of where your business is going and how you will get to where you want to be. You communicate this effectively across your teams. People particularly commented on how well your meetings with staff this winter had helped them with understanding the 'big picture' for Skern Lodge and engaged them with thinking how their team could contribute to your business strategies.

"The January meetings were a great opportunity to understand how it all works across the site. They were enlightening and very well managed."

- On a more regular basis, people meet together to discuss how business is going, what is planned and how they might improve their services. Your staff certainly are not 'shy in coming forward', when they feel that they have something to contribute, and there are many opportunities available for them to be involved.

"We have a chat during our team break every day. Our manager joins us and outlines what's coming up. It's also a chance for us to give our feedback."

"You really can have a say!"

"After the course, we got together and discussed what went well and what needed changing. You're always involved in improvements."

- The 'open door' style of management evident at Skern Lodge encourages people to voice their opinions, Directors and managers are seen to be very approachable and welcoming to peoples' views. Staff also commented on how well they are supported to take a lead in bringing about improvement, whether that is by their managers, or through help from colleagues, or simply having the resources to deliver a better service.

"You really feel involved and you can make a difference. Your views are never discarded – ideas are taken on board and considered."

"We have discussions in our team about how we can take business forward. We chat with directors – they are very open to peoples' ideas and will weigh them up and progress them if useful."

"I do feel that any idea that I've brought up has been listened to."

- A key factor in encouraging staff to take ownership of improvement within the business is that relationships here are built on respect and trust, between management and team members and vice versa, and also between colleagues. Managers have great confidence in the professional abilities of their teams; this is cultivated through recruiting the right people and through the effort that you put in to ensuring that everyone develops good skill levels.

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"I think that they really do trust you – big time! I've been surprised at the level of trust that they give you. They're happy for me to alter programmes as I see fit. I feel really empowered!"

"I've been encouraged to lead groups and even if you make a mistake, that's seen as an opportunity for you to learn."

- The environment which you have cultivated, where relationships are firmly based on openness and trust, engender very healthy attitudes across your workforce. People are clearly committed to Skern Lodge and have real pride in your organisation and what you collectively achieve. This stimulates a positive, upwards 'spiral of improvement', which should sustain peoples' enthusiasm for driving improvement and the benefits that will accrue to your business.

"We really do take pride in our part of the business and with what we are producing."

"I have a lot of commitment to Skern Lodge and pride in what we do. I know that my colleagues do as well."

"It's 'clicked' even more this winter. It's like being in a partnership with each other. It's got a bit of 'John Lewis' about it, and that's driven by the directors."

"It's nice how every single person here is passionate for what we do – more so than any other centre I've worked in."

- Another facet of your ethos that supports peoples' strong commitment to improving your business, is how well you recognise the contribution of staff to your success, whether on a personal or team level. People commented on how they appreciate the proactive use of spontaneous praise or positive feedback of customer comments. They also value the events that you organise which bring people together socially, and your firm commitment to supporting their continuing professional development.

"You do feel valued; John (MD) comes to see you at the end of a busy day and says 'thanks, that really worked well'."

"They certainly treat staff well!"

- Continuous improvement is also recognised in the ways that you support your team through effective management and development. The following comments outline some of the examples given.

"Communications with the team are now much more open. We hear about plans, discuss problems and can air our views."

"We're in a better place than we were 3 or 4 years ago. We bring people in earlier for training at the start of the season, so that they're up to speed when they are needed."

"The meetings that we had over winter were a very positive development."

2, How well different teams work together to deliver a 'seamless' service.

(Relevant to Indicators 4, 5 & 6 of the IIP Standard and ER 7.14, of the wider Framework.)

- When staff reflect on their contribution to delivering your services, whilst there is an inevitable focus on what they and their team undertake, there is also good appreciation of how that fits in to the 'bigger picture' of all the services that make up your customers' experience. There is certainly no indication of any 'silo thinking' mentality, which is found in some organisations.

"Everyone is striving for the same goals – it's a brilliant environment!"

"Other teams are more cooperative than they have been in the past. There is less of 'this is the way that we do things'."

"As a whole team effort, it generally works very well. We're all important!"

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Bringing together your team of permanent staff over the winter period is an activity that everyone involved felt was very worthwhile and beneficial, through engendering a sounder understanding of how different teams should work together in the interest of your customers and also to stimulate thinking about how that could be improved. These meetings have really engaged your staff with helping to improve your services from a more holistic perspective, and many commented that they hope this sort of exercise will be sustained in the future.

“They were really positive and they made me think how we could work together much better. You understand the difficulties and overlaps etc. It was a bit of a breakthrough!”

“The winter meetings were fantastic! They gave everyone an insight into what others are doing.”

“The winter meetings were brilliant! They helped to improve your empathy with other parts of the business, which was really helpful. There’s scope for doing more of that in the future. The benefits are showing already, for example, holding pre-visit meetings for a large customer and that brings more cohesion, for example changeover felt more ‘slick’ and worked better.”

- Communication between teams is generally very effective and ensures that knowledge and information is shared in order that each function within your organisation is fully informed so that they can meet the needs of your customers. Social events and group training days, for example, also bring people from different teams together and help to strengthen relationships and the sense of being part of ‘one team’.

“There’s good communication, especially at the seniors’ level. We’re all working for the same ends.”

“We’re organised well across the teams. It’s easy to find out information and that works well for our customers.”

“There are good, open relationships between teams, and effective communication. It feels stronger.”

- Directors and managers are reinforcing the ‘whole team’ ethos to delivering services, whether through interacting effectively as a management team, or in how they support their particular teams. You have team leaders who understand ‘what good management looks like’ from a Skern Lodge perspective and they clearly take their lead from Directors.

“Management meetings help to support us working as a management team.”

- Management support’ at all levels in Skern Lodge’ is effective in meeting the needs of your staff. Directors are seen to be very good role models for leadership and management, and this ‘sets the scene’ for how others support their own teams and work in harmony with other teams.

“The senior team do inspire confidence in you in how they’re moving the business forward.”

“I can’t fault the directors. They’re amazing! They care about each and every employee and take a real interest in you.”

- Everyone involved in this visit recognised that the support delivered through their line managers certainly meets their needs; this is a key requirement if teams are to continually deliver services that meet your customers’ expectations.

“You can go to any manager for support, which is positive.”

“There are definitely good relationships with management and you get the support that you need.

There’s a genuine interest in you – the best that I’ve ever experienced, and that’s what makes Skern so good!”

“Managers will all give you those 5 minutes to speak with them. They’re very accessible.”

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3. How well new staff integrate into the Skern Lodge team.

(Relevant to Indicators 5 & 8 of the Standard)

- Your structured induction programme, combined with in-team training and development, is supporting people who are new to Skern Lodge very effectively. Those who have started over the past 12 months felt that they were able to 'get up to speed' quickly and that they were made to feel very welcome and comfortable in their team and wider Skern Lodge environment.

"They were particularly good with my start. The 1 to 1 induction training was done in a sensible order. The orange competencies book is very professional, enabling you to recap and consolidate your training. It all makes sure that you are comfortable and can work with confidence."

New starters and staff who have been a part of your team for some time, appreciate the opportunities to receive regular, constructive feedback, whether through the PDM discussion or more informally. The positive and open working relationships which people enjoy ensure that feedback can be given and received easily, and gives impetus to peoples' continuing development.

"You get that feedback. You can always talk to the full time staff and they will give you advice and steer you in a different way if needed. It's a 'safe place' for feedback and it's two - way."

4. Does the individualistic approach for supporting L&D meet peoples' needs?

(Relevant to Indicators 2, 3, 8 & 9 of the Standard and ERs 2.16, 2.17 of the wider Framework)

- A very strong message coming from my conversations with your staff is that you clearly look upon your team members as individuals, not just a 'homogenous' workforce, and you are very considerate towards them in ensuring that their particular needs are met, whether that relates to their work or their personal lives.

"The flexibility that you find here (in meeting an individual's particular needs) is quite rare!"

- This personalised approach to supporting your team members is recognised as strength of your development planning. People appreciate that they can meet their development needs in a variety of ways, whether through courses, internal coaching, self-learning etc. and they will always be supported by your management team in pursuing those avenues.

"Senior instructors have different specialisms and we spend time with them to improve our skills. They do that well!"

"On a personal front, every instructor is different and they are really aware of that, which makes you work hard for them. They're good at identifying which senior staff are best placed to support people with less experience."

- Adopting a 'tailored' approach to development planning and activities also helps to motivate team members to take responsibility for their own development. Discussions about 'what will work best' for an individual encourage ownership, and an understanding that training is supported to meet personal aspirations as well as business needs, encourages people to 'drive' their ongoing development. You really have cultivated an environment in which people feel engaged in continuous learning.

"People don't just develop skills to work at Skern, but also for working in the wider industry. Personal development is actively supported – they value people!"

"It's not just about what Skern Lodge needs, but they are willing to support your progression."



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“You’re learning all the time, but you’re also helping others to learn.”

Whilst people feel engaged in continuous learning, they do not, however, feel that they are being coerced into developing new skills.

“Part of it is a ‘nudge in the right direction’, but people here do want to learn. You’re not pushed to do things if that’s not required, and that’s positive.”

- Your managers are proactive with ensuring that their team members are achieving the outcomes anticipated from the activities they are undertaking. This is a topic for regular discussion within teams and is ‘backed up’ through signing off competencies in the orange file for example. People feel that this rigour is important, particularly to ensure that as you promote multi-skilling, it is delivered to a consistently high standard.

“You’re eased into new activities and there’s great support.”

“Using the Ripple Effect is bringing more learning intent into sessions. It’s a great resource for anyone to use.”

- Management meetings look at the training you provide and how that has impacted on your performance; for example, through customer feedback which indicates that through multi-skilling staff, you can provide continuity for customers across a range of activities, and also how that helps with course programming. Team members also recognise that your investment in their development not only benefits them, but also has a positive impact on the performance of their team and consequently the services that Skern Lodge is able to deliver.

“The success of Skern Lodge is really down to the team. People feel that it is a career and not just a ‘summer job’.”

“Our success is not just down to luck. We get lots of repeat customers and that’s down to us; whether it’s good instruction, good management or excellent customer service.”

Some suggestions and ideas to support your continuing development

Communication across your teams

- There were one or two comments indicating that whilst there are generally excellent relationships between teams and colleagues, there are individuals who feel that this might be improved; for example, a seasonal team member might feel less valued by permanent colleagues due to how they feel those colleagues communicate with them.
- Another reflection on inter-team relationships suggested that staff in some teams might be more open with ‘holding their hands up’ when things did not go according to plan or mistakes were made, than others. There was some recognition that occasionally, individuals might focus on making excuses rather than moving on and finding solutions. This is certainly not part of your ethos at Skern Lodge, and perhaps your ‘no blame culture’ should be reinforced periodically with staff.
- Communication between colleagues, in any organisation, does not always ‘get the message across’ in ways that meet the needs of individuals. We all have differing personality traits and this influences our receptiveness to how messages are communicated. I recently undertook an assessment of an organisation in South Devon who had used a technique called E Colours to encourage a better understanding of how individuals could communicate more effectively with colleagues, and this had delivered remarkably positive results. Information can be found at



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<http://www.equilibria.com/ecolors.html>, although there are also other products that can be used to achieve similar goals. If you would like to speak with this organisation to learn more about their experience, I can arrange that for you. It may give your team a different perspective on how to improve communication.

Developing your team

- From my conversations, it would seem that an end of year 'wash up' or PDM with seasonally employed staff could be undertaken more consistently and with a greater focus on what an individual might focus on over the winter months that would give them the best chance of re-employment next year. Individuals commented that there may be an 'assumption' on the part of management that individuals will return, but perhaps this needs to be 'firmed up' more and a development plan agreed for the winter period. Some did comment that you do get in touch with potential returnees to discuss expectations during the winter period, but it was felt that a more structured 'close' to their season would be welcome.
- Whilst your managers and team leaders are able to access support for their development easily, they may find the website 'Managers Pitstop' a useful resource to support their self-learning and ongoing development.. This provides a range of on-line tutorials covering a wide spectrum of management techniques, for example, managing performance, assertiveness skills, effective teamwork, managing time, etc. It is a good resource to 'dip in' to if a team leader just needs a little extra reassurance about handling a particular situation. Go to:
<http://www.managerspitstop.com/home>
Users need to register to access the resources, but that is free.

Engaging staff in continuing improvement

- As your winter meetings received such a positive response and will influence improvements to how teams work together this year, it was suggested that a get together in the middle of the season to review progress and make any adjustments would be very useful. Perhaps this is something that is already on your agenda, but if not, it would be worthwhile considering.
- Staff appreciate your meetings and they currently work well. However, it is a good idea for those running meetings to reflect on how well they are managed, so that they remain productive and time is used effectively in a busy work environment. There are techniques that you might explore in this context: <http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkil/RunningMeetings.htm> offers some useful tips. <http://www.sunwords.com/2013/08/05/how-to-have-better-meetings-no-slides-no-chairs/> has some interesting ideas, used by industry leaders.
- Whilst you already have an environment which encourages people to contribute their ideas to support continuing improvement; you might find value in using aspects of 'Lean' techniques to co-ordinate and structure how people are engaged in improving your business and services.

The aim of 'Lean' techniques is to identify and reduce 'waste' (that is, any activity that doesn't add value to your customers' experience). Lean techniques were developed to improve efficiency in the manufacturing sector, but are now applied and add value across a range of sectors. The concept of a 'Lean School' (developed in the USA) is an interesting idea that may stimulate some new thoughts on areas that might be improved. For example, see; <http://www.leaneducation.com/whitepaper/9-wastes-in-education.pdf> outlining the '9 wastes' commonly found in a education environment:



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Another useful technique that frequently delivers 'easy wins' is '5S'. See, for example:
<http://www.slideshare.net/leantransformation/daily-15-minute-office-5-s> and
<http://www.simplified.com/simpldocs/5S%20starterkitl.pdf>

Recognising good performance

- Comment was made that it would be welcome if there was some enhancement to pay levels for increased qualifications and expertise. Whilst more pay is always welcome; people do recognise that this is not the main motivator for people working at Skern Lodge. Indeed, when that comment was made, the individual balanced that view with their appreciation for the excellent support given to pursue a qualification.
- It might be useful to review your recognition strategy periodically to see if there are any new ideas that may 'add value' to how you recognise staff, without much financial outlay. IIP Resources has some useful guidance which may stimulate new ideas. See:
<http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/resources/ideas/how-make-reward-and-recognition-pay-without-breaking-bank> Also,
<http://www.thestairway.co.uk/publications/rewarding-recognising-and-motivating-customer-service-staff.html> offers a useful overview.

And finally – a 'straw poll'

I asked participants in this visit to rate Skern Lodge as an employer, in terms of your overall support for staff, on a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (brilliant). The average score was 9.2 out of 10 – which is very impressive, given peoples' natural reluctance to mark anything as 10 out of 10!

When asked what would need to improve in order for them to score 10, the following comments were offered (please bear in mind that these are 'one off' comments; however, they may offer 'food for thought' when planning improvements):

- Seasonality of the job, but appreciates the scope for progression to full time.
- Being seasonal, would like full time work.
- Better WiFi connection
- Improving the living-in accommodation
- A chat with a manager to 'close out' the season on a personal basis.
- More money, but they will discuss that with you.
- Less confident / outgoing people can be overlooked.
- Holding a team day when people start in April (thinks that will be happening this year).
- More activities could be offered in addition to the current ones. Would stretch the team more.
- I don't give 10's as there's always room for improvement, but I can't identify anything at present!
- No improvements that I can think of / can't fault anything! (X5)



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Outcomes table - evidence requirements framework matrix

Core Standard										
Total number of core evidence requirements assessed - 37										
Total number of core evidence requirements met - 37										
	Indicators									
ERs	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	n/a	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	
5	n/a		✓						✓	
6	✓									
Wider Framework										
Total number of additional evidence requirements assessed - 8										
Total number of additional evidence requirements met - 8										
	Indicators									
ERs	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
4	Core	Core	Core		Core				Core	
5	Core		Core						Core	
6	Core									
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