



JDS Australia - Support for staff benefits everyone

Just three and a half years ago, John Bearsley and two colleagues established JDS Australia, an Australian owned information technology company offering services and solutions based upon the Mercury and Oracle product suites. Such is its success that JDS has almost 20 staff members in a variety of roles, including a full-time office manager, a range of consultants and a growing back-end support team. Success, however, has not always come easily.

Tips from JDS Australia:

- if you can't offer comparative pay consider other ways of attracting staff
- have regular training and brainstorming sessions with all staff
- allow skilled workers the autonomy to manage their own tasks

A sense of community attracts top staff

As John explains, it can be very difficult to attract and retain top-quality staff when you're competing with the highly lucrative contracting market for consultants with well-developed niche specialist skills. So John has developed some interesting and effective HR strategies any business could support, strategies that benefit both the employee and the company as a whole.

One of JDS Australia's most sensible strategies is to differentiate itself from the contracting market. Whereas a contractor is required to work as an individual, with a high daily rate but limited support and considerable risk (potentially long periods without work), JDS tries to encourage a sense of community, tailoring its roles to the needs and circumstances of its employees. He acknowledges JDS cannot offer candidates equivalent remuneration, but highlights it offers compensation in the form of support. Consultants have the support of a team behind them, allowing them to feel like part of a larger team as opposed to a lone ranger. In addition to project-based teamwork, the entire team comes together once a month for a combination of formal training and an informal opportunity to get together and share ideas.

At JDS, they call this a 'fly-home Friday'. John says he learnt it from the first company he joined, and found it invaluable as a consultant. Not only does the half-day's formal training help build confidence and expertise, but the afternoon, with a distinctive social flavour, promotes what John describes as the 'cross-pollination of ideas'. As a manager, he is genuinely interested in the ideas of his staff – this empowers his staff, assures them their opinion is valuable and works well for the business too.

Independence without being alone

When recruiting staff, JDS looks for candidates with the right cultural fit, strong 'soft' skills, a technical aptitude and a good reputation. True, that's a lot to ask, but the value of the old adage of quality over quantity is beyond dispute in the small business environment. As a result, JDS is not overly prescriptive in managing its staff – it does not dictate how they should go about their work – so the staff retain one of the benefits of contracting – a degree of autonomy – but without ever being alone.