

SHIPYARD BEGEJ

Human Resource Strategy Driving Success



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By Dunja ILIĆ

Shipyard Begej is owned by the Dutch company Mercurius Shipping Group. Begej produces 1000-ton and over chemical tankers and container ships. It is challenging, physical work as all of their ships are custom made from steel plates. The plates are cut and then mounted into sections before being welded together piece by piece. The next stage involves the outfitting where the ships engines, piping systems and living areas are fixed to the steel structure to create a fully functioning, working vessel.

Heavy equipment abounds at the shipyard including 100 ton auto cranes, trucks, cutting machinery and welding apparatus. Working outside, it's hot in summer and freezing in winter. However, what Begej constructs is multi-million euro working ships that generate serious revenues for their customers.

One of the strengths of the company is its ability to perform steel construction and outfitting at the one location. On most occasions, new orders are placed because a ship captain wins a new transportation contract. Begej's ability to perform both construction functions means that captains get their ships delivered faster and begin earning revenues. It's only in the last two years that Begej could perform both steel construction and outfitting.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Serbia is quite a traditional society where men tend to lead, particularly in the work environment. Two years ago there were very few women employed at the shipyard; today there are many more, particularly in the engineering sector. Management at the shipyard believes that one of the more important developments in society and specifically in the workplace is the encouragement of equal opportunity.

Business manager Peter Thompson comes from a liberal society where discrimination of

any kind - from age, to skin colour and gender - is considered a serious legal and moral issue. At Begej he has implemented a rigorous human resources program for recruiting team members. Peter works on the premise that 'a balanced team makes for a better team', and as a result they have achieved a good combination of experienced, young, male and female employees. The team mostly consists of males however many of their newer employees are women.

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“When recruiting our new employees, we simply look to hire the best people we possibly can,” says Thompson. “We look for young ambitious people who display self discipline, an eagerness to learn and have strong grades from university. We know that building a great company starts with providing the right environment - one that encourages people to be open, to be able to make mistakes and to challenge traditional thinking.”

Thompson comments that initially he was met with some resistance when employing women at the shipyard. “Some people were of the opinion that women would not be respected by the other workers, but their success has

been truly remarkable,” he says.

Some of the women employed at Shipyard Begej include:

Ivana Marković – Educated in electrical engineering at Belgrade University, at 26 Ivana leads the electrical team responsible for the outfitting of Shipyard Begej's ships. She manages a team of six electricians. “The most important element for me was the chance Begej gave me to use my education on site. One's ability to execute the job is first and foremost and I am happy to work with colleagues who share the same view,” Ivana says.

Dragana Andjelković – Educated in industrial engineering at Novi Sad University, Dragana 27 is responsible for production processes development and investment projects for implementation of the machinery. Working with the entire production department, her job varies from the monitoring of ship launching equipment repair, working with equipment vendors, documenting new investments to project managing the installation of new cranes. “I love my job,” Dragana says, “being a female engineer brings another angle to the business. It's a great opportunity to be part of the Begej team.” She adds with a smile, “On one occasion, I offered to bake a cake for the workers who helped to complete the installation of a new workshop. Now that's something a man would never come up with.”

Nataša Govedarica Damljanović – Educated in architecture and interior design at McGill University in Canada, Nataša 29, is responsible for the interior design and full outfitting of the living areas of the ships. Day-to-day, Nataša works with the ships captains ensuring clients wishes are turned into vessels of personalized style, with furniture manufacturers ensuring the best quality of product and installation. During construction, she works daily with the shipyard's experienced carpentry team on technical solutions. Nataša comments, “My work in design is creative but founded on fundamental engineering and construction principals and the shipyards carpentry team. Perhaps, as a woman I needed to work harder to gain respect but once I demonstrated abilities through actions, I felt fully accepted and overall a welcomed addition making a stronger team.”

Dragana Bojat – Educated in mechanical engineering at Zrenjanin University, Dragana 35 works in the ship design department. “It feels great to be part of a team where accu-



rate work, attention to detail and good concentration are respected. If someone makes a mistake, it makes no difference whether it as a man or it's me. They are just not acceptable no matter which gender you are. Working at the design bureau means tight deadlines, fre-

quent changes and as a woman I think I am coping with it in a much calmer way than my male colleagues,” she says.

lent female applicants. At first, I was surprised because women working in construction are not so common in the West. Whilst on average men are certainly physically stronger than women and better at production works, on average women have a greater attention to de-

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THE DRIVE TOWARDS COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Being a leading employer of choice is central to Begej Shipyards strategy, Thompson claims that hiring, training and taking care of the right people is not something that has a beginning and end point. Human resource management is a strategy and it's a key component in Begej's program to establish a superior competitive advantage.

Begej strives to be a leading proponent of equal opportunity. The company encourages its people to voice their opinions, be open in communication and to progress their careers. “We work hard on the premise of aligning the objectives of our employees with those of the company. This is something much easier said than done but our commitment is to this,” comments Thompson.

Thompson finishes by saying that “The strategies applied between average performing companies and those that are successful are quite small but the results are remarkably different. The great companies are the ones that are committed to a long term view for their employees and continue to challenge their boundaries.”