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**Human Investment:** *Stories of Human Investment and Bottomline Results*

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## THE NATIONAL AVIARY

### The Situation

The National Aviary is one of the best-kept secrets in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Featuring exotic birds and the experts who care for them, and providing education to visitors, The National Aviary is enjoyed by students, families and bird enthusiasts of all ages.

The National Aviary's mission attracts very passionate people who love their work. The National Aviary board and senior management place a high value on employee engagement, teamwork, and collaboration. They believe that excellence in these areas directly contribute to the bottom line with increased synergies for highest quality programs and maximum earning potential.

### Investment in Human Capital

As input to their 2010 strategic plan, the National Aviary contracted with Tracey Palmieri from Comprehensive Human Capital Solutions, CHCS, to conduct an analysis of the level of the organization's employee engagement. Through an online survey and individual, confidential interviews with a sampling of employees, Tracey was able to quickly earn the trust of the staff and uncover the barriers to increased engagement. Working alongside National Aviary management, CHCS developed a focused plan of attack to address the findings from the analysis.

#### *Key actions of the plan:*

- Improvements to the employee evaluation process
- Improvements to the staff development process
- Creation of a staff learning curriculum including:
  - Team building activities
  - Adoption of the True Colors behavioral assessment tool
  - Management training for all managers
  - Senior staff / departmental retreats
  - Executive coaching
- Implementation of improved communication mechanisms

In 2013, CHCS conducted a second Employee Engagement survey and analysis. The National Aviary management team was thrilled to learn that the level of engagement increased 10% from their baseline in 2010! They attribute their significant improvement to the implementation of the recommendations and suggestions that resulted from the previous assessment.

*"I can't tell you how much different it is after working with Tracey. People are much happier. We understand each other better and have open and honest discussion between management and staff."*

**Cheryl Tracy**  
National Aviary  
CFO



Again, CHCS assisted the National Aviary in analysis of the findings, creation of action plans, and implementation of those plans to further increase employee engagement.

### **What was the Return on Human Capital Investment?**

The National Aviary saw an immediate and lasting impact from the work of CHCS. Through commitment to the recommended action plan, employee trust and engagement levels were strengthened. Employees remarked, “Now everyone has a role in the organization’s overall success!”

#### *People Matter ...*

- National Aviary’s core values of trust and respect were strengthened.
- A common bond was formed across departments, speaking one “true colors” language that everyone understands.
- In 2014, National Aviary employees participated in a confidential survey by Workplace Dynamics and was voted as one of Pittsburgh’s Top Places to Work! (#31 of 85)
- National Aviary won several awards from its peers, in recognition of staff achievements.
- Operational efficiency improved through streamlined operations, increased teamwork and collaboration, and enhanced communications. No waste; lean and mean!

#### *... So Do Results!*

- Employee retention rates are very strong and morale is high.
- In 2014, National Aviary had the best year in its 62-year history, breaking records in attendance and earned revenue!

“It is amazing how quickly Tracey picked up on things like the dynamics and issues. She is a really good listener. By helping to enhance engagement, communication and collaboration, Tracey helped us develop buy in; we now are working together at our maximum potential to fulfill our mission.”

– Cheryl Tracy, National Aviary Managing Director