*Case 5 Allure Cruise Line*[*\**](http://digitalbookshelf.argosy.edu/books/9780558759742/content/id/ch05ast01)*—Challenges of Strategic Growth and Organizational Effectiveness: Part 2*



**INTERVIEW WITH ALLURE CRUISE LINE EXECUTIVE**

Additional interviews were conducted with several members of Allure’s senior leadership team to obtain more information regarding the cruise industry and Allure’s current challenges.

The following interview is from an initial meeting with Joy Prazulinni, the hotel director who lives and works onboard the Allure *Regent* ship, who shared her perspective on the challenges of life onboard the Allure ships as well as some of the current issues that need to be addressed.

* OD Team Member: *“Ms. Prazulinni, what are the hotel director’s responsibilities?”*
* Ms. Prazulinni: *“The hotel director is responsible for all of the hotel operations within the ship. This includes housekeeping, rooms and front desk operations, purser’s office, restaurant and dining rooms, all passenger entertainment, and the cruise director’s area. The hotel director is one of the senior executives onboard the ship and reports to the captain.”*

\*Note: The data used to develop this case study was garnered through the managers of an existing cruise line. The name of the cruise line, as well as the individuals in the case study, and some data have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the cruise line; specific data changes can be found in Section 4 of this study.

* OD Team Member: *“Describe for me the demographic makeup of your ship’s crew.”*
* Ms. Prazulinni: *“As you know there are three vessels in the Allure fleet, but overall I’d say there are on average about 40 or so nationalities represented onboard at any one time. This fluctuates between 53 and 32, depending on people’s contracts and such (as you probably know, each week when we are in our home port so many crew sign off—it’s the end of their contract time—and so many crew come onboard to replace them, having just had their time off). The nationality of our crew is in constant flux.”*
* OD Team Member: *“That is a lot of cultures. How would you describe the communication between the managers and officers onboard?”*
* Ms. Prazulinni: *“Well, for safety reasons all crew members are required to pass an English test. This is done at their hire. If a crew member doesn’t meet the minimum standards, they frankly don’t work for Allure or any cruise line until their English is up to the minimum. However, for many of our officers, English is their fourth or fifth language. There is also a large variety in the accents of the officers which can make it difficult for them to understand each other. The difficulty becomes even greater when they are communicating on the phone or via email.*
* *“As for the rest of the crew, the language communication barrier is often a challenge. We rely on our hiring agents to screen potential crew for English skills, as we logistically cannot, so there are varying levels of ability in English.”*
* OD Team Member: *“That is a challenge. What about the food for the crew?”*
* Ms. Prazulinni: *“As hotel director, I am responsible for all food service onboard, not just for our passengers but our ‘internal passengers’—our crew—as well; and this is something I hear much about. It is very difficult to please all of the different tastes of the nationalities on board; we typically serve Western food for a variety of reasons (such as preparation times and available ingredients). Trying to appeal to all tastes and cultures has high costs associated* *with trying to do so, but we know that there is a high impact on the morale of the crew. Every ethnic group wants attention, although they try to be understanding and make efforts. For example, we know that some cultures eat rice at every meal, so now we are serving rice three times a day in our crew mess.”*
* OD Team Member: *“How would you describe the social life of the crew members onboard?”*
* Ms. Prazulinni: *“Well, remember that the crew members are living and working together in a small space; they spend a lot of time together both, how do you say, ‘on the clock’ and off it as well. They socialize heavily, [laughs] and sometimes too heavily. Many of the crew are between the ages of 19 and their early 40s, and like to ‘party’ and socialize. Many crew members date and break up, and this causes huge conflicts since they live and work in such close proximity. If the crew members are married, we try to keep them on the same ship in the same cabin.*
* *“Many of the female crew members on board feel confused about the cultural differences in what is and what is not acceptable behavior between the different genders. Some cultures onboard do not feel that women are ‘equal’ and therefore do not treat the women as equals or in authority, especially if the woman is an officer and the man is lower in rank. While I am Italian and did not grow up in the States, I understand that the U.S. has laws against harassment. Other countries do not have such laws and therefore it is not necessarily something these men—and women—have had to learn.*
* *“The social life has a big impact on crew morale. Crew members tend to be fatigued because of their long working hours; many experience loneliness. They live in cramped quarters and have little privacy; they feel confined. And they miss their family and friends back home. Other factors impacting morale include the food concerns, and a perceived lack of entertainment for crew onboard. The crew members have many ups and downs to their onboard existence.*
* *“This really affects the shipboard managers: They need to create an environment to help the crew feel valued and thanked. Allure has designated an area of beach on the island leased by the company and visited on some of the itineraries. We also have parties for the crew. On the new ships, Allure would like to provide larger crew areas and more crew amenities.”*
* OD Team Member: *“Let’s go back to discussing the varied backgrounds and societal cultures onboard. Is there animosity among people from different countries onboard the ships?”*
* Ms. Prazulinni: *“You can definitely see a ‘brotherhood mentality’ at times within the crew members. You hate to stereotype, but you do see trends among people of the same nationality. For example, members of the Filipino culture tend to be more collective, quiet, they have an ‘all for one’ attitude; they enjoy singing karaoke as a pastime. Many members of the Jamaican culture are more individualistic, they like loud music, dancing, party loudly, very gregarious. So you have these two fundamentally different ways of looking at life; for example, the Filipinos feel disrespected by the Jamaicans. As you know we have a larger population of French in our dining rooms so it is natural they form a ‘family,’ sometimes to the exclusion of other crew.”*
* OD Team Member: *“I’ve heard the term ‘mafia’ sometimes used onboard ships. Can you explain what that means in this context?”*
* Ms. Prazulinni: *“In the dining room, most crew members are from Eastern and Western Europe. There are also Jamaican and Filipino crew members here as well, but they are assigned to separate stations of the restaurants, such as the beverage area or kitchen area. The dining rooms are extremely hierarchical with many jobs at many different levels. The leader of each of the dining rooms is the Dining Room Manager, who is supported by the head servers. Under each head server are the servers, and each server is assisted by the assistant servers. The head server needs to be a presence within the dining room and talk to all passengers, ensure that they are enjoying their experience, etc. Servers are tipped personnel and therefore make small salaries with tips being divided up among the servers and assistant servers. However, servers do make very good money, so their positions are highly sought after.*
* *“‘Dining Room Mafia’ is the terminology that the crew uses to describe what occurs in the dining room. Often the head server shows favoritism for and promotes only the crew members who are from his of her own country. Typically, Eastern and Western Europeans are in leadership positions within the dining room and food service areas.*
* *“When the head servers are confronted, they deny that this is occurring. It is very difficult to track because the head server keeps all of the performance records. This is a persistent problem—and it is a dining room only phenomenon for some reason.*
* *“The leadership team on board has not been able to get their arms around this problem. But unfortunately this isn’t just an Allure problem: This behavior occurs across all cruise lines—culturally existent within the industry,* *and dining room crew see it as a fact of life. We want this to end at Allure, and hopefully your team can help us find a solution.”*
* OD Team Member: *“The dining room is an interesting work environment. Any other items we should know about regarding their work area?”*
* Ms. Prazulinni: *“It’s important to understand some of the operational constraints within the food service area. U.S. Public Health Service inspects dining room and galley areas fairly frequently. These scores are a very big deal in the cruise industry, and they’re usually published in newspapers around the world. When they meet our goal scores, managers receive a bonus. The catch is that all managers within the food prep and service areas need to work well together to provide high quality experience, while keeping the cleanliness of our operation to standards.”*
* OD Team Member: *“I think you have answered my questions, Ms. Prazulinni. Are there any final thoughts that you may have?”*
* Ms. Prazulinni: *“I really hope that your team can help us out. Allure is a wonderful organization, and our growth will be a great thing for our passengers our crew, and of course our business. In Italy we have a saying, that loosely translated in English is ‘family is the foundation of your house, and your tower can only be as tall as its foundation can support.’ I have been at sea for over 12 years and this has been my favorite family to work with. But like all families, we have some challenges that we want your help to overcome. We want to improve that foundation so our tower can be even higher.”*

**ASSIGNMENT**

**Cross-cultural and People Challenges**

The organization is currently experiencing some morale issues among their crew and some cross-cultural challenges on board the three existing ships. These issues are beginning to have an impact on the service that is being provided to the passengers.

The senior leadership team at Allure Cruise Line is concerned that some of the current issues with the crew members onboard the ships will interfere with larger business plans that are coming soon. They realize that, if they do not address these “people issues” now, it could potentially jeopardize the success of the Mediterranean expansion project in the future.

Given the information that is presented by Joy Prazulinni, the hotel director, what does your team think are the main “people issues” onboard Allure’s ships?

• Discuss some of the key factors that influence the morale of the crew. What recommendations do you have for the leaders on board to help improve the morale of the crew?

• Discuss the communication challenges on board. How could these communication issues be improved?

• What recommendations do you have for the leadership team of Allure to help improve the dissatisfaction of the crew with the variety of food that is offered in the mess hall?

• What are your impressions of Allure’s policy which limits the socialization between certain crew and passengers? Since this is having a negative impact on the morale of the crew (Joy noted a “rift” between those crew who are permitted to fraternize with passengers and those who cannot), would you recommend that Allure change this policy to allow more crew to mix with the passengers, or rescind the policy so no crew can fraternize?

• Discuss some of the cross-cultural and social misunderstandings, particularly in terms of sexual harassment, among the crew members. What are your recommendations to address these serious misunderstandings?

• Discuss some the cross-cultural challenges among the Jamaican and Filipino crew members. How might this situation be improved?

• Discuss the problems with the mafias on board. What specific recommendations do you have for the leadership team of Allure to address this problem?

• Does this case study relate to the contemporary business environment? If not, why? If it does, how?