

# Travel gurus get a dose of leadership reality



Tina Sampson with Vail Resorts talks leadership to a group of travel experts. Photo/Kathryn Reed

**By Kathryn Reed**

STATELINE – “High-functioning teams lead to high-performing organizations.”

That was one of the messages delivered by Tina Sampson, vice president of sales for Vail Resorts. She was a speaker this month at the Mountain Travel Symposium at Harrah’s Lake Tahoe. Her topic – Leadership for Innovation.

She was there to put a hammer to the belief that culture building should be considered “soft stuff.”

“We believe innovations begins with culture,” Sampson said of the Colorado-based company that has three ski resorts in the Lake Tahoe area. “We believe superior financial performance is

unlocked through leadership.”

She said that Vail Resorts CEO Rob Katz has said he is not striving to be the best ski or travel company, but instead is working to be the best leadership company in the world.

A title does not make one a leader. Leadership is a journey.

“You have to make a priority for this soft stuff,” Sampson said.

Sampson had the group of more than 50 people answer 18 questions/statements related to their work teams with “rarely,” “sometimes,” or “usually.” Questions ranged from: Morale is significantly impacted by the failure to achieve team goals to team members acknowledge their weaknesses/mistakes.

The scores indicated whether an area was probably not a problem for the team, could be a problem or an issue needs to be addressed.

“If you have high trust, you should have high conflict,” Sampson said.

Sampson had a handout that said high-functioning teams are ones whose members:

- Trust one another on a fundamental, emotional level, and are comfortable being vulnerable with each other about their weaknesses, mistakes, fears, and behaviors.
- Use conflict as a catalyst.
- Share a strong sense of identity.
- Exercise superior levels of participation, cooperation, and collaboration in making decisions.
- Set aside their individual needs and agendas and focus almost exclusively on what is best for the team.

- Have high levels of personal and interpersonal mastery, resulting in high group emotional intelligence.