

Training: The Achilles Heel of Hospitality Operations

Recognizing that we work in a detail-intensive business, most hospitality managers understand that comprehensive and systematic training for both subordinate managers and line employees is an imperative. Yet, the sad fact is that training is an afterthought in many operations, left up to department heads or front line supervisors to conceive, design, and implement.

Why is this so often the case? I offer the following as some of the factors that make training so difficult for all of us:

- First, is the standalone nature of many operations. Busy managers have little time and, in some cases, lack the necessary skill set to design a comprehensive training curriculum for employees. Complicating this is the fact that operations often span multiple business disciplines, including accounting, human resources, marketing, customer/guest/member relations, golf operations, food and beverage, aquatics, golf course maintenance, and other areas. Few managers have the detailed knowledge of all these disciplines to design the well-integrated systems, policies, and procedures that cover all areas of the operation.
- The general manager and management staff have not formally defined the standards of quality and service they wish to provide their customers. Without formal standards, how do they determine their training needs?
- Given the many positions involved in hospitality operations, there is the need to develop a curriculum for each position to provide employees the appropriate skill set. This is a daunting task, though focusing on critical customer-facing positions is the first step.
- In addition to individual skills training, employees must be trained in the organizational culture and values; laws affecting the workplace; employee work rules and policies; liability abatement training such as safety, sanitation, and public health; human resource issues such as sexual harassment, discrimination, conduct, and performance criteria; accounting policies and procedures relating to their work such as point of sale training, inventory procedures, and timekeeping; and all the operation's various organizational systems that allow it to function efficiently.
- Managers at all levels must be trained in a variety of disciplines including leadership; service culture and values; various laws affecting operations; departmental systems; accounting standards, policies, and procedures; human resource standards, policies, and procedures — to name a few.
- Few operations have a comprehensive training plan that guides subordinate managers in training standards, responsibilities, budgets, resources, and necessary curricula.
- There is no easy way for the general manager to monitor training execution due to the lack in most operations of training administration software and training benchmarks. Short of attending each training session, how does the GM know who is training and meeting the ongoing requirements of a multi-faceted curriculum.
- In times of tight budgets (and when is it ever not such a time?), the cost of every hour of training is multiplied by the number of employees being trained and their hourly wage — and this can have a significant impact on the bottom line.
- The management staff does not have the will to make it happen given all the other management requirements, demands on their time, and competing priorities.

- The owners, while demanding high service levels, do not understand the direct link between formal training and quality service or, even more importantly, the challenging task of designing and implementing an effective enterprise-wide training program. In many cases, the general manager has not developed the training goals, assessments, plan, proposed budget, and "sold" the owners on its necessity.

The bottom line on all these issues is that unless focused on and attended to religiously, they fall through the cracks. While the training requirements of a well-run operation seem overwhelming, they can be effectively implemented by a variety of strategies.

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