

GRUPO EL FUERTE

MAKE PEOPLE HAPPY: Corporate Social Responsibility & Employee Work-Life Balance

Introduction

The El Fuerte Group is a hotel group that was founded by the entrepreneur José Luque Manzano from Seville on the 4th July 1957, with the Hotel El Fuerte in Marbella, one of the pioneer hotels on the Costa del Sol. When it opened, the hotel boasted 33 rooms and the first lift in the whole of Malaga. Since then, this small company has grown continuously. On the death of its founder in 1984, his sons took the reins and thus began an era of renovation and expansion, whilst always conserving the ethical and professional values that have always set them apart as true entrepreneurs in personnel management within the Spanish hotel industry.

To date, the group has opened the following hotels:

- Hotel Fuerte Conil in Conil de la Frontera (Cádiz) (1999)
- Hotel Fuerte Miramar-Spa, Marbella (Málaga) (2001)
- Hotel Fuerte Grazalema, the smallest of the group in Sierra de Cádiz (Cádiz) (2002)
- Hotel Fuerte Costa de la Luz (Conil) (2004)
- Hotel Sunscape Puerto Aventuras, the first abroad, in Riviera Maya (México) (2004)
- Hotel Fuerte el Rompido (Huelva) (2005).

A real estate division was acquired by the El Fuerte Hotel chain in 2005. In addition, an agrifood company, Agridesarollo, was established for the development of sustainable agriculture, and the El Fuerte Foundation was created to preserve the company's solid ethical values.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Work-Life Balance at El Fuerte Group

The successful growth of this hotel chain is due to the tremendous effort made to achieve the highest quality standards in all activities undertaken. To date, the company has retained its family-run ethos and this philosophy has allowed the organisation to grow exponentially. Currently the El Fuerte group has a workforce of more than 800 employees.

The El Fuerte group recognises the importance of staff relations, training and staff policies to achieving high levels of quality service. Indeed, more recently the hotel group has concentrated its efforts on improving the quality of life of its' staff as the principal strategy for staff retention.

Following their founder's motto of "Make People Happy!" the El Fuerte group takes the notion of corporate social responsibility seriously and works to improve the economic and social standing of communities where the company's hotels are located, thereby improving the personal and professional lives of its staff. Work on this approach

culminated in the El Fuerte Group's Social Improvement Plan which was launched in July 2003. This programme is based upon two main principals, 'belonging' and 'communication', and aims to improve the quality of life of employees through a series of economic initiatives and activities. It also hopes to improve communication amongst staff and stimulate participation in the social and community activities (mainly in social projects related to environmental improvement.)

The activities which comprise the Social Improvement Plan are directed towards supporting members of staff with more than one years service:

- Assistance towards their children's education:
 - The company pays 50% of kindergarten costs (the cost of a kindergarten is calculated based on the average cost of those kindergartens located within the area in which the hotel is situated.)
 - Textbooks. Grants of around €90 per academic year towards textbooks until the child reaches university.
- Private medical insurance. Aside from the obligatory state health insurance, staff also have access to private medical insurance, with its obvious attendant advantages.
- Gifts. In the event of a marriage or birth, employees receive a financial endowment from the organisation.
- Interest-free loans and salary advances. Both loans and salary advances issued are evaluated on a case by case basis.
- Training. Aside from the internal training provided by the organisation, the social improvement plan also offers grants towards participating in external training courses. These grants will fund between 50 to 100% of the total costs, provided the course links to work activities and is not a course already provided by the organisation.

These initiatives mean that staff can enjoy an improved quality of life. To complement these activities, employees participate in social projects through the Foundation which aims to get employees involved in voluntary projects in the local community where the hotels are located, such as organising flea markets, charity functions, raffles and fundraisers.

All of these initiatives and activities are intended to promote the values of collaboration, cooperation and support that constitute the pillars of family-run companies and which are in line with the fundamental values of El Fuerte Hotel Group.

Conclusions

The recent implementation of the Social Improvement Plan makes it subject to regular revision and adaptation. New locations are added to the plan every time a new hotel is opened. The dual objectives underpinning the plan are to further the career paths of employees as well as to improve their overall quality of life. El Fuerte is an organisation that is proud of its ethical and social principals but its' main challenge is to develop a strategy to further spread these, so that these values lead to competitive advantages in the market. The most difficult challenge facing management is to attract a clientele that supports the principals of both social improvement and sustainable tourism as increased business volume is required to make the plan a long-term and lasting reality.