

HOTEL CASO XUSTO

Support from Professional Hospitality Bodies in Development of Staff

Introduction

Hotel Casa Xusto is a small rural hotel set in the little town of Franco some 130 km from the capital of Asturias, Oviedo. This town of 4000 inhabitants is located in a very picturesque area, lying just a few kilometres from the sea and circled by the Asturian mountains. In this setting, the owners decided to open Hotel Casa Xusto in March 2007, in a traditional building dating from the 19th Century. In order to compete effectively and establish a unique selling point in an area where there is a lot of competition amongst the many rural inns and hotels, the goal of management was to provide a top quality, customer-centred service. Like the majority of the hotel owners in the area, the main problem facing Casa Xusto's owners was where to source qualified personnel in this decidedly rural environment where there is no hotel industry tradition. Their strategy was to invest heavily in personnel. In order to obtain seasonal staff, they decided to seek the support and cooperation of local people in the hotel's activities. In addition, they also took advantage of the opportunities offered by joining the regional Hotel and Catering Trade Organisations in order to receive help with managing employee relations.

Employee Relations at Hotel Casa Xusto

From the beginning, management had a crystal clear strategy for managing employee relations – their goal was to recruit three motivated women from the local area, engage them with full-time annualised contracts, develop their skill sets to an advanced level and involve them in the management of the hotel, thus offering these women the opportunity of landing a well-paid, stable job within this rural area. In recruiting for these positions, management paid particular attention to the key qualities of capacity to delegate, friendliness and punctuality. This reflected a belief that if management demonstrated such qualities, staff loyalty and job satisfaction would result.

Once these three key members of staff had been recruited, the problem arose as to how and where staff training could be provided to core employees and seasonal staff. The town of Franco lies some 130 km from the Asturian capital, Oviedo, where training courses, when there are any, focus more on basic hospitality skills. Such courses would be insufficient for key staff who would be expected to meet the high quality standards demanded by Casa Xusto's clients. Sending personnel off to the capital was not a viable solution either, due to the disruption this would cause in the family lives of employees. The solution to this problem was to contact Hostelería de Asturias (Asturias Hotel and Catering), an association of Tourism companies, establishments and organisations within the province that offers its associates a series of hotel and catering management services.

Through this association Casa Xusto found that it was possible to arrange for advanced hotel and catering courses to be provided in the town of Franco. However, Casa Xusto did not have the sufficient number of employees necessary for the effective delivery of

such courses. Determined to proceed with the courses, the management got in touch with other hotel and catering establishments in the town and surrounding areas that were having similar problems in obtaining the necessary numbers and together they were able to make up the number of trainees required. With the collaboration of these other establishments, several courses have been held over the past year that have trained staff and potential hotel employees in a series of subjects such as customer service, wine-tasting, quality control and risk prevention in the workplace.

With this initiative, not only were the anticipated training objectives achieved but also, in part, the problem of sourcing temporary staff was resolved as the collaboration with the other companies increased the options for finding suitable staff. In addition, due to the provision of local training courses, closer ties were established with the local population who began to perceive the hotel as an engine for social coordination.

Other initiatives also came about as a result of these training programmes. For example, the hotel held a series of Open Days along with the town of Franco's Cultural Centre, the Third Age Centre and the Town Hall. During these open days, the hotel made its facilities available free of charge for any local activities.

Conclusion

In the last year Hotel Casa Xusto has managed to resolve the principal problem facing hoteliers, especially those hoteliers located in rural areas, of finding qualified personnel and dealing with seasonality. However, the staffing problem is only partially solved since Casa Xusto is a small hotel which does not, at the moment, require a large staff. But the prospects are good: the hotel is successful and they foresee the need to expand in the future in which case the recruitment issues may need to be readdressed.

Staff recruitment in the area is not easy, there is a tendency toward depopulation of the area in favour of urban areas and the limited economic capacity of the companies does not make the creation of stable employment easy. In order to address this issue one idea has been to provide hotel and catering courses (specialising in Asturian Hospitality and Catering) for the large number of immigrant workers from Eastern block countries, with the backing of the local associations and government organisations. This would mean that there would be a flow of qualified personnel not only for Casa Xusto but for all the hoteliers in the area.