

P. MCCORMACK & SONS, DUBLIN, IRELAND

“We will stick with you to help you get through whatever difficulties you are experiencing”

Introduction

Paddy McCormack is a man who is willing to get his hands dirty and manages to make a livelihood in a pressured and declining market. When Paddy first started out, McCormack’s Bar was a good old traditional Irish Pub from which almost all the sales came from alcohol. Today, the traditional pub serves bistro style food and is run by a man willing to learn from others, to learn from his mistakes and who has developed a flexible approach to working.

Currently, the Pub generates about 70% of sales from food and food-related drink and has a turnover of around 2 Million Euros per year in what is a declining market. Aside from the recession, Paddy blames the now strictly enforced drink drive laws for the downturn in business. As Paddy states:

“People who used to just drop in socially for a couple of pints, don’t do so anymore if they go home and put the car in the driveway. While they might intend to come back out, the reality is that they don’t get round to it, so business has declined a good bit over the last 2 or 3 years”.

The smoking ban has not had such a severe impact as the strict approach taken to drink driving. Paddy built a smoking lounge in the pub’s garden with a television and seating which is every bit as comfortable as that inside the pub.

This case study will examine staff relations at McCormacks bar. It will look at the methods by which Paddy McCormack inspires and motivates his staff and will examine the lessons learned over many years of operation.

Approach to Learning and Business

Paddy is always willing to learn from others and tried a few years back to introduce to the pub some of the working practices that friends of his had implemented in the Hotel Industry. He understood the power of delegation and the need for him to step back a little and let others do the work. Consequently, he employed a Food and Beverage Manager, Assistant Bar Manager, Duty Managers and the like. However, these appointments did not bring the anticipated benefits to the business:

“These moves did not help the business. I must say I found it to be a disaster for me. I just got myself further and further removed from the feel of my business and the feedback I was getting wasn’t any use. I was getting all the boxes ticked and all the forms filled up but I had

loads of information but it was nonsense you know. So when I got into it I realise that they were just ticking boxes as well".

Paddy found that business was going downhill and the delegation approach just wasn't working. So Paddy decided to get more involved in the business again. He realised that small businesses work most effectively with the direct input of owners. Now back on at the steering wheel, Paddy is finding that working closely with the business and with the staff has brought considerable success. Even in difficult times and with turnover down he is still able to make a reasonable profit.

Getting Close to Your Staff

Adopting a flexible approach to dealing with staff issues is vital to ensure employees work at an optimum level. Paddy realises that staff are people and people will always have issues they need to deal with and gives says:

"All our lives change on a continuous basis. Sometime, you're going through a period when you're very happy and you're getting on well with your partner and other times you may be experiencing a difficult period caused by, for instance a broken relationship".

Many of the staff employed at McCormack's are working a long way from home, may be living in flats with difficult flatmates or may just be missing home. These and many other personal and interpersonal issues are what a pub manager will come across on an almost daily basis in dealing with staff. Paddy believes the key to good staff relations is to recognise this but enable the staff to 'Be here now' when they are at work.

In order to work closely with staff, Paddy will sit down regularly with each person to discuss where they are, their performance and what might help improve things. While this is not a formal process it seems to be very much part of the ethos of the pub. Paddy also adopts an operational role in the business and often finds that when his sleeves are rolled up, it allows him to get closer to people and understand what the issues might be.

"You tend to get this gossip kind of thing in pubs when you are working in them like - I'm here 50 or 60 hours per week so there are times when you're sweeping the car park or cleaning glasses and people just say to you 'I believe Mary's not going out with Nick anymore and you think 'oh really'... but it's just kind idle chat. So you tend to know what's going on in their lives"

He does however feel you need to watch what you believe from this and ensure that you do not get too close to people. In the end, you are the boss and even if you think you have get along with people it is easy to kid yourself.

You do tend to think you are closer to them than you are and when push comes to shove you're not. Consequently, I sometimes find it difficult to eyeball someone that I'm particularly fond of and say to them no.. it's not working.

The Best for the Business and for Staff

This closeness with staff tends to lead to inform practices and allows for the development of a flexible approach to dealing with staff. This allows the business to work closely with staff and get the best out of them while they are with you. An example of this flexibility is that offered to a young woman with children where Paddy allowed the employee to start shifts later than usual so that her partner can be home to take care of the kids. He has also allowed extra time to Polish employees to allow them to visit elderly parents in Poland and has give employees space to get their head together after a break up in a relationship.

"If you need assistance to get yourself back to where you were before whatever personal little mishap happened, that's fine, but when you do come in here, you must present yourself the way you used to but we will stick with you to help you get through whatever difficulties you are experiencing".

Flexibility is viewed however as something of a two-way street. Staff at McCormack's bar is also expected to show flexibility in the way they work and the tasks they do. Waiters are expected to work in the kitchen and understand the issues faced there; Bar Staff are expected to help the waiting staff and everyone is expected to deal with any incidents that occur.

Keeping Close to the Business

Paddy McCormack has learned though to keep close to the business. He spends time talking to customers about their experience. Perhaps unlike staff, he is never satisfied with the standard answer of 'OK' to the question of 'how was your meal'. He spends time to ask in more detail about a customer's experience, particularly when the host comes to pay the bill. Although Paddy wishes that his staff might do the same, he finds that even with all his flexibility and friendliness most of the time staff are not really looking for a genuine answer, but are looking to tick a box. When he senses issues in the kitchen or bar, he will invite staff to a meeting (giving them a few days notice) and will expect that staff will have thought through the issues and come up with some answers. He will then chair a 20 minute meeting with all those in the department and expects staff to be able to articulate possible solutions to particular issues.

Staff and Staffing

The pub employs a total of 18 staff, all of whom are full time – with one exception. Over the last few years there has been a change in the structure of the pub. While there used to be a demand for part time work from students - with the recession and the introduction of staff from Poland and Romania, Paddy finds that people want full time jobs. He also found that retention levels are higher when he employs full-time staff. Diversity in the workforce has brought no real integration issues with all of the staff working well together and there are good relations between staff and the local community.

"I must say I find them excellent, excellent. I've found I've been particularly lucky with the Polish boys and girls we've had here and the Romanians are particularly nice people we've no difficulty relating with them at all and no difficulty with them integrating with Irish people either".

Conclusion

P McCormack & Sons have found a way to blend the needs of staff and the needs of the business. A strong focus on people and doing best you can for them appears to have engendered a response to the job and to the customer that is holding its own in difficult times. It seems that treating your people well gives not just the right to expect high performance - that surely comes from paying the wages, but to expect commitment and motivation from staff. Paddy has found that motivated and performance focused staff will give good customer service. While he may not have managed to achieve all he would want and his staff still go through the motions in some areas, Paddy McCormack has learnt from past mistakes, has now a successful thriving business and looks forward to better times ahead.