

SCOTCH WHISKY EXPERIENCE, EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

A Company where Staff are not Driven to Drink!

Introduction

The Scotch Whisky Experience is based in the main tourist thoroughfare of the Royal Mile in Edinburgh, only a short distance from Edinburgh Castle. It was established in 1987 by the Whisky industry and is wholly owned by them. The primary objective of the Scotch Whisky Experience is to educate people, to "be a window on the world for the industry". It was initially set up because it was felt that there was nowhere in Scotland to showcase the national drink. The mission statement of the Scotch Whisky Experience is "to inspire, enthuse and impassion our visitors about Scotch Whisky in everything we do".

The Scotch Whisky Experience is made up of a Whisky Tour that covers all aspects of production and blending, the history and culture, and includes an electric barrel car ride. The Scotch Whisky Experience has a number of different income streams: in addition to the tour and shop they also have a restaurant which was built in 1998; a bar which is exclusively scotch whisky where they show whisky in a versatile light for example by doing cocktails; they cater for private functions (for weddings, book launches etc); they do whisky tasting both on and off site; and they have a scotch whisky training school (est. 2001). The Scotch Whisky Experience employs 28 full-time members of staff, which rises to 50 in the summer months.

The focus of this case study is on strategies for improving staff motivation and morale at the Scotch Whisky Experience. Interviews were carried out at the premises of the Scotch Whisky Experience. Three members of staff were interviewed, including the Director and General Manager, the HR Administrator and the Marketing Administrator. The Director had been in post for 20 years, the HR Administrator just over a year (although she has previously worked as a guide) and the Marketing Administrator two and a half years (of this, just over a year was spent as a guide).

From the interviews, it was clear that there is a high level of morale and motivation among the staff at the Scotch Whisky Experience. This could be related to a combination of factors that were put in place by the company. These were training provision; communication, rewards and social events. How these impact on staff motivation and moral is outlined below.

Training

Training plays a very important part in the ethos of the company and plays an important part in sustaining high levels of motivation and morale among staff. As one member of staff notes:

The job here is not just a job. You are learning and that is one of the reasons we tend to keep people. You are constantly learning and there is opportunity for development as well.

Staff starting out at the Scotch Whisky Experience generally know very little about whisky and the whisky industry, so in response to this the Scotch Whisky School was set up. This is a school that was created to very quickly bring staff up to speed regarding the whisky industry. The day-long course covers production and blending, history, appreciation, and also tips on how to sell and serve whisky as well as alcohol responsibility. There is an examination at the end, and the qualification, one of the few qualifications in whisky now available, is vetted by the industry. One of the main benefits for the staff is that it immediately increases their knowledge about the industry which also increases both their motivation and their ability to sell.

Staff are trained to work in all areas of the business, either as guides, in the shop, in the bar, in the box office or assisting in the restaurant. This means that their daily work is very varied as they are rarely in one area of the business for more than an hour at time. The company believes that this variation in work enhances staff retention.

As the company has only a small budget available for training, they transformed the Scotch Whisky School into an income stream by offering their courses to the hospitality trade and to the public. The training costs £150 for the full day course. This strategy has been so successful that the training school now makes a profit.

The company also has 'whisky modules' which staff can work through in their own time. These were introduced because it was accepted that at times staff may suffer from low morale, especially in the winter when there are far fewer visitors, feeding into staff boredom because there is not so much work to do. In response to this, the management team put together the 12 whisky modules which the staff work through in their own time or when it is quiet. The modules are seen motivational, as one member of staff notes:

I had been a guide for some time and you got to a stage where you were either getting bored because you know the job so well or you can go and do a little bit extra and find out some more, improve your knowledge of the tourism industry. I started the modules and you felt as though you had something that you were working towards.

The company carries out their own customer care training, which is a half-day course that looks at all areas of the business. There is also staff training once a week, which tends to be driven by staff demand, although there is also a staff training schedule. The staff have a lot of input as to what training is provided.

Training is also provided for management staff. There is a team building event held once a year for managers, but there is also a strong emphasis on 'on-the-job' training. It was noted that as so many people within the organisation have 'risen through the ranks' and have an in-depth knowledge of the business, that there is a lot of experience at the senior management level that can be passed on to the line managers

on the floor. They also use a lot of conferences and seminars to assist the management team and have weekly managers' meetings.

Communication

There are very good levels of communication between staff and management within the company. This plays an important part in maintaining morale and motivation, and, as one staff member notes:

It is excellent. The team here is fantastic. I have quite a good rapport with a lot of the staff. Everyone tends to work together really well. It is a good atmosphere; everyone is quite friendly and tends to band together.

The company operates an open door policy which means that there is good communication between management and staff. Staff reported that when they were guides it was easy for them to approach management if they had any issues, or simply wanted to talk to them. The open door policy is seen as having a positive effect on staff morale as staff feel involved in company decision making. For example, staff have been consulted on a new tour that will be introduced.

Staff have an annual appraisal, where they fill out a form and make comments about the management team. If there is a common theme coming through for somebody whether it is a positive or a negative, feedback will be provided to individuals.

Staff are made aware of the operating costs of the company, and monthly, the Director outlines their profit and loss standing. For example, at various times of the year they have quizzes about what they think the annual staff bill is, or the cost of the electricity bill. Staff report that this gives them a better understanding of the costs involved in running the company and why they are paid what they are.

Staff also have daily briefing sessions before their shift which provide an opportunity for managers to inform staff of specific events/issues that may arise that day as well as offering scope for staff to feedback to management. There are no regular staff meetings per se because they already have daily briefings in place. If anything important were to be raised, however, a separate time will be scheduled for a staff meeting.

Rewards

The company has a number of reward schemes which have been seen as helpful in improving motivation and morale. In particular, the company operates a reward scheme called 'The Angel Share'. If the line managers see any of the staff do something that is 'one step further' they give them an Angel Share Card, which is then put into a box. Once a month they hold a draw and whoever's card is pulled wins a prize. Rewards are also given out at other times, for example, during busy periods, or for those who up-sell the most tours at the box office. If staff do something out of the ordinary they will get a 'Wow Award'. These are bigger awards that are only presented about once a year to a member of staff who has saved the company money, or driven the business forward. For example, a member of the technical staff was given a 'Wow Award' for developing a sound system in his own time.

Social Events

Social events are also used to keep staff motivated. There are three events run each year for the staff. There is (i) a pre-season team building event; (ii) when the season ends (circa September), they have a thank-you party; and (iii) an off-site Christmas night where dinner is paid for by the company. In addition they have guest speakers from the industry address staff about twice a year. They also have a number of more informal nights out. The social aspect of the job was seen as important by the staff:

It was the people mainly that made the job, particularly from the guiding team point of view, it was a very close team and socially we did a lot of things. We did team building and lots of fun things so it was a good working environment.

Conclusion

This case study set out to examine the strategies for improving motivation and morale employed by the Scotch Whisky Experience. It is clear that the combination of a number of factors contributed to high levels of motivation and morale in this organisation. Perhaps most significant is the emphasis placed on the importance of training by the company. The staff are given extensive training with plenty of opportunities to continue their training. It is this emphasis on training that is seen as maintaining motivation among staff. The different reward schemes mean that staff are rewarded for their work. Also of importance is the good communication between staff and management, whereby staff are always able to talk to management about any issues they have with their work. Finally, the social aspect of the work, through formal and informal events, mean that staff have plenty of opportunities to get to know staff and management outside of the normal working environment.