

APARTHOTEL AN DER SPREE AND RESTAURANT SALZ & PFEFFER, BERLIN, GERMANY

Employee Training and Strategies to Enhance Staff Wellbeing

Introduction

The Aparthotel an der Spree is a four star hotel which is situated on the river Spree in Berlin. The hotel has a capacity of 50 rooms with approximately 100 beds. The hotel also has a conference centre entitled "Glückskind" (darling of fortune). Furthermore there is the restaurant "Salz & Pfeffer" which is used by hotel guests and non-residents. The hotel generates about two-thirds of its business volume with the hotel and about 33 percent with the restaurant. The guests of the hotel are divided evenly between business customers, conference attendees and holiday-makers.

The hotel and restaurant have 14 full-time and 10 part-time employees. Furthermore five apprentices are trained in the hotel. The majority of employees are female (about 60-65 percent women and 30-35 percent men). The average age of employees is 30 years old and 17 years old for apprentices. In the summertime the hotel and restaurant also engage up to five temporary employees.

The hotel does not use outsourcing for any of its functions because they set a high value on delivering superior levels of customer service. Furthermore the management want each employee to feel part of the team. Such aims are difficult to reach if functions are outsourced.

HR Strategies

The hotel and restaurant experienced a turnaround about one and a half years ago with a lot of structural changes. At that time Mrs Brender joined the management team as acting manager supported by Mrs. Kronbichler the director of the Aparthotel an der Spree. A new and clear corporate structure was developed. This structure is defined by a flat hierarchy, which gives all employees broad areas of responsibility. Furthermore the hotel and restaurant began to prioritise employee welfare and embraced a new training concept called cognitive training since Mrs Brender works also as cognitive trainer.

In the conference centre "Glückskind" the hotel organised several seminars and lectures on various topics including psychological self-help. This emphasis on employee wellbeing is also reflected in the company culture. When the hotel management recruit new employees they look to see if the new employee shares a 'lust for life'.

Training

The hotel management considers the training and development of its staff as very important. Therefore a lot of training is organised for employees. Training courses have been organised on topics including:

- Cognitive training
- Service quality coaching
- Telephone training
- Special training about coffee and its preparation

Furthermore employees can submit requests for further education and training. Mrs Brender, as acting manager attaches great importance to her own further education; therefore she attends a lot of training courses and lectures about service quality, management topics and cognitive training.

The cognitive training of employees is conducted by Mrs Brender, whereas the other hospitality industry related training is given by the German Hotel and Restaurant Association or the "ServiceQualität Berlin" initiative. This training gives information about new developments in the hospitality industry. Moreover some further education is organised in cooperation with a training institute.

The cognitive training plays a important role at the hotel and restaurant, because it is an essential part of the seminars and workshops which are organised by the hotel in their conference centre "Glückskind". Therefore it is very important that employees convey the spirit of cognitive training. During the training, hotel employees learn to take life in their own hands and to see problems and worries as unsolved tasks which have to be tackled. They also learn strategies to best achieve their set objectives.

Enhancing Staff Welfare

Aparthotel an der Spree sees employee wellbeing as a top priority. Therefore a lot of efforts are made to encourage a healthy way of living. Every day after the hotel breakfast buffet is closed the hotel employees have breakfast together. This breakfast also includes healthy options such as fresh fruits. The acting manager goes jogging every morning at 7.00 a.m. and invites all employees who have time and feel like jogging to join her.

The management believes that it is very important to serve as a model for employees. Moreover management hold the view that most stress is homemade and avoidable if individuals just allow themselves more time to solve tasks.

Shortfalls and Limitations

Even with the best HR strategies and the most qualified staff there can be days when a lot of things go wrong - especially little things which have been addressed hundreds of times before. For example a conference dust bin not being emptied. In the hotel these days are called "Murmeltiertage" (Groundhog days). On such days it is very important to take a deep breathe, calm down and continue with the work.

Some employees felt a bit overstrained when they had cognitive training on a weekly basis. Consequently, a monthly meeting is now arranged dealing with objective-setting and cognitive training.

Actual Impact and Perceived Benefits

The applied strategies have a lot of benefits for the hotel and restaurant but also for staff and guests. Due to the harmonious atmosphere and the improvement of the breakfast buffet, guests feel very comfortable and find their stay in the hotel even more enjoyable. In recognition for delivering excellent service quality the hotel gained the seal of approval from the "ServiceQualität Berlin" initiative.

Furthermore the strategies help to reduce employee stress and raise awareness of healthy living. For this reason the number of sickness days in 2007 was significantly lower than in 2006.

The strategies also have a beneficial influence on team morale. The team has a high level of solidarity and celebrates all birthdays together. Moreover they have a communal Christmas party and corporate event.

Action Points for the Future

In the future the hotel plans to concentrate more on congressional and conference business. That would help the hotel diversify away from seasonal business and generate a more constant use of the hotel and restaurant during the whole year. This means that more employees can be retained during the low season in winter. Furthermore the hotel cooperates closely with a local training institute and Aparthotel an der Spree hosts a lot of further training organised by this institute. The management of the hotel wants extend the level of cooperation with the training institute and arrange in the future that hotel employees can attend these seminars if there are interesting themes and available capacity.

Insights, Advice and Observations

During the case study some useful advice was given. Mrs Brender holds the opinion, that if you are comfortable with yourself and cherish your employees, you contribute to the growth of the company. It is essential to compliment employees on favourable outcomes and also to excuse mistakes that have occurred. Furthermore it is important that employees possess, besides specialist knowledge, the qualities of charisma, cordiality and vitality. That makes for a good atmosphere in which the guests of the hotel feel comfortable too.

Moreover it is vital as an executive to succeed in the balance between delegating and doing something on your own. Sometimes it is necessary to delegate work and experience so that the employees can also solve problems on their own.

Conclusion

This case study examines the importance of employee training. It is crucial to train staff, since this is an instrument for advancing their performance and careers, but it also motivates staff and keeps them up-to-date with new developments in the industry. Furthermore this case study reveals that it is not only individually but also economically meaningful to encourage a healthy way of living, since this can reduce the number of sickness days significantly.

