



# Employee Orientation, Training and Professional Development

Companies should not underestimate the importance of a well-thought-out orientation programme. New employees often have an inadequate picture of the working environment and job requirements/expectations. Moreover, employee training has to be seen as part of regular operations that will give a business a competitive advantage and a better return on its investment. Providing for your staff's ongoing professional development makes solid business sense.

# Customer Service Plus – Creating Customer Loyalty

## Accra Beach Hotel

This hotel discovered that enthusiasm for its custom-designed customer service programme continued long after the initial programme launch. This was due to staff involvement in the programme's development, in-house incentives and awards, management's commitment and the hotel's continued investment in human resources by providing further learning opportunities for staff and good monitoring systems for continuous assessment.

Where  
Barbados

Mission statement

- To provide the highest level of efficiency and friendliness, and a captivating environment, maximizing financial rewards, employee satisfaction and guest experiences

Type of business

Hotel

Size

- Number of rooms – 148
- Dining room capacity – 240
- Conference room capacity – 250

Ownership

- Private sector
- Unionized

Operating

50 years

Management structure

- Independent

Key products and services

- Accommodation, food and beverage facilities, conference/meeting space

Workforce

- 120-150 full-time
- 10 part-time

In-house incentive programmes

- Employee of the month
- Supervisor of the quarter
- Employee and supervisor of the year
- Back- and front-of-house performance awards

Awards received

- Hotel of the year (2002: BHTA)
- Honesty award for housekeeping staff (2002: Minister of Tourism)
- Restaurant employee of the year (2002: Minister of Tourism)

[www.accrabeachhotel.com](http://www.accrabeachhotel.com)

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## The HR Challenge

After assessing its departmental links and determining the factors that affect guest service, the Accra Beach Hotel saw the need to create a customer service training programme that would:

1. develop customer loyalty
2. increase the hotel's quality of guest service
3. distinguish the hotel from its competitors
4. improve communication within departments
5. create monitoring systems to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme

## Overview

Businesses learn all too quickly that customer satisfaction cannot be overlooked in any operation, let alone in the highly competitive and sometimes vulnerable tourism industry. The Accra Beach Resort in Christ Church, Barbados knew its spectacular beaches and elegant facilities were not enough for it to stay ahead of its competitors. Its reputation for providing friendly, quality service had to become second nature to all staff. This meant:

- investing in training
- implementing additional programmes and activities that would encourage staff productivity
- improving job performance and job satisfaction

HR management is the primary responsibility of the Accra Beach Hotel's general manager. Training resources are purchased when needed and the HR policies remain flexible. Supervisors and managers are encouraged to respond to staff issues arising from the implementation of new and existing in-house training programmes.

## Implementation Steps:

1. An external consultant was hired to design a customer service training programme to suit the specific needs of the Accra Beach Hotel.

2. All the stakeholders (i.e., staff, supervisors and management in all departments) were invited to contribute to the development process.

These activities included:

- informal discussions with staff
  - conducting focus groups with management
  - using 'mystery shoppers' (i.e., paid individuals acting as customers and reporting their observations) to determine the level of existing service
  - undertaking team-building exercises with staff
  - having a forum for departmental heads and managers after the first meeting with the general manager
- Involving the stakeholders in the initial development stages is thought to have decreased the number of modifications that had to be made to the programme after implementation.

3. The Customer Service Plus programme was implemented in stages to all staff over a period of six to seven months. The external consultant trained staff mainly during working hours, although some training had to take place on off-days and during pre-shift sessions.

Training took place in both individual and group sessions and used videos, workbooks, role-playing, interactive discussions and follow-up activities.

4. Managers and supervisors were given additional support and further learning opportunities. This was needed as these individuals had to practice new skills and become competent in the new procedures.

5. To foster cross-departmental cooperation and to keep morale high, various award and incentive programmes were created, such as:

- employee of the month
- supervisor of the quarter
- employee of the year
- supervisor of the year
- back- and front-of-house performance awards
- management performance-based bonus programmes

6. Ongoing monitoring systems were devised to monitor guest satisfaction indexes.

suitable candidates who:

- wanted to make a career in the tourism industry
- demonstrated the best potential fit within the organization
- had the ability to learn the job and the inter-personal skills required

Two components used to measure a candidate during the panel interviews were:

- the stability of the individual's past employment record
- the candidate's post-secondary studies, i.e., his/her personal development and growth since leaving high school/college

### *Additional learning opportunities provided*

The hotel provided all front-line staff, supervisors and middle and senior management with additional learning opportunities, including the payment of registration fees to attend local non-credit training courses. Examples of some professional development opportunities include:

- Each year, the Accra Beach Hotel pays all travel and course expenses for one manager to attend the Cornell Professional Development programme. During the one-week programme, the manager undergoes intensive training sessions at Cornell. Upon return, he or she is encouraged to complete Cornell's online courses.

The objective is for managers to apply what they have learned to their daily work regime at the hotel.

- To encourage staff to participate in local training, the hotel circulates advertised courses that meet with management's approval. Staff can seek out courses, but it is generally at the encouragement of managers that individual staff members undertake additional training. If a course

## What Was Done

### *Training to our standards*

Without an abundant supply of qualified workers to choose from, the Accra Beach Hotel developed its own in-house orientation and training programmes to teach staff the required performance standards.

### *Selection and retention*

Using panel interviews, and involving departmental managers, the hotel's general manager used a hiring strategy to select

directly relates to an employee's job and directly benefits the individual as well as the work environment, the hotel reimburses up to 50 per cent of the cost.

### *Customer Service Plus programme*

The purpose of developing a unique customer service programme was to:

- improve employees' performance by providing them with the required service excellence training
- distinguish the hotel's products and services from its competitors
- create a high level of customer loyalty

### **Results:**

#### *Staff reactions*

Initially, there was some resistance from managers to the new programme, but this was largely alleviated with the use of focus groups during the development stages of the Customer Service Plus programme.

Some supervisors and middle managers were more concerned with daily operations. The new training programme required taking extra time to practice the new skills and to provide follow up to their staff.

However, in time all staff experienced greater camaraderie and were highly motivated. Service excellence became everyone's priority.

#### *Monitoring*

Guest satisfaction indexes (GSI) improved immediately after the programme was implemented, but then fell. Subsequently, incentive and award programmes were put in place to encourage and sustain high levels of customer service and this has resulted in stabilized GSI and reinforced training skills.

With no established monitoring system in place, ongoing feedback comes from guest comment forms that are tabulated on a chart on a monthly basis. This gives each department feedback on how guests perceive their services through related guest service indicators.

### *Challenges*

The greatest obstacles encountered during the implementation of the Customer Service Plus programme were:

- unavailability of training dates
- limited meeting space available for training
- systematically having staff attend the sessions
- difficulty in gathering data directly related to the training transfer outcomes and in evaluating the effectiveness of training
- resistance from some departmental managers

### *Future HR issues*

The Accra Beach Hotel is addressing its current HR needs with training programmes and incentives, but it realizes that its most important human resource issue in the future will be staff retention. It acknowledges that it must continually provide new and additional incentives to junior and front-line employees.

### *Key lessons for smaller operations*

For small- and medium-size operations wanting to implement a similar programme, the Accra Beach Hotel has these suggestions:

- Have a training officer or HR staff member attend all training sessions.
- Keep successes alive by ensuring that supervisors and managers play an essential role in maintaining the momentum of the programme through incentive and recognition programmes.
- Cross-train staff members.

- Manage emotions and expectations to ensure that they are realistic.

## Discussion Questions

1. What approaches can be taken when introducing a new programme to encourage the support and buy-in of senior administrators and supervisory/management staff?
2. How important is the continued monitoring of guest satisfaction? Does this need to be done formally?
3. What are ways that a tourism business can maintain freshness in ongoing customer service training programmes?

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# Developing Managerial Talent

## Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre

To meet its future staffing needs, the HR department of this hotel customized a training programme from its parent organization, Hilton International Americas. The programme was designed to attract and develop the best talent in the organization in order that those staff – or ‘team members’, as Hilton prefers to call them – with high potential can build their knowledge and skills and prepare for future managerial positions.

Where  
Trinidad

**Mission statement**

- Determined to delight the customer in all aspects of Trinidad hospitality, gaining repeat business and referrals

**Type of business**

Hotel

**Size**

- 98 rooms

**Ownership**

- Public (owned by Government of Trinidad and Tobago)
- Unionized

**Operating**

41 years

**Management structure**

- Contract (Hilton International Americas)

**Key products and services**

- Pleasure and business services
- Spa services, dining facilities, entertainment and conference space

**Workforce**

- 450 full-time
- 200-225 part-time

**In-house incentive programmes**

- Hilton Moments Award for Excellence
- Departmental incentives
- Group life and health insurance
- Bonuses for management
- Subsidized educational assistance
- Two free meals a day while on duty
- Discounted room and food and beverage rates at other Hilton International properties

**Awards received**

- National Award for Excellence in Human Resources (2000 & 2002: Prime Minister)

[www.hiltoncaribbean.com](http://www.hiltoncaribbean.com)



# The HR Challenge

The Hilton hotel philosophy is to provide opportunities for personal development at all levels of the organization. For the Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre, the launch of a new company-wide programme to identify high-potential team members within the organization and to facilitate the development of these individuals at each property initially met with poor results.

The challenge for the Trinidad Hilton HR department was how to customize a North American programme – developed and perfected by Hilton International for all Hilton properties – to suit the specific needs of the Caribbean.

## Overview

Nestled on 25 acres of beautifully landscaped gardens overlooking the capital city of Port of Spain, the Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre has a reputation for providing quality service. This historic hotel is part of the Hilton chain of hotels.

Hilton hotels consider that *“Only those that feel valued can truly add value”*. By making available the extras that make a difference to guests, Hilton provides its team members with an exciting and beneficial work environment to develop their careers in tourism.

Team member development issues are an important component of the Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre’s everyday business practices. This is particularly true when implementing corporate programmes. The hotel’s HR department has found from past experience that any new programmes designed to assist team members’ personal

development or career paths need to be adapted to reflect individual needs. For this reason, team members’ potentials are incorporated when designing individual goals and monitoring programmes to ensure higher success rates.

HR team members participate in decision-making with senior management during strategic and business planning sessions. People-management and training requirements – often seen as a business expense that can be cut when profits are low – are viewed here as an essential part of the hotel’s business strategy.

The Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre credits its high retention rates to the fact that it offers better terms and conditions of service (as compared to its competitors) and premium salaries. These compensation and benefit strategies are viewed as part of the organization’s competitive strategy, which pays attention to issues such as:

- service quality and excellence
- training and development systems
- autonomy and empowerment, allowing team members on the front lines to respond immediately to the needs of the customer

By focusing on developing and retaining top-quality team members, the Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre has gained a reputation for service excellence and for being an employer of choice.

As part of the Hilton family, the Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre is able to offer outstanding on-line training and learning opportunities to both front-line and senior management team members through the Hilton University in areas such as:

- supervisory management
- train-the-trainer
- leadership development training
- computer literacy
- high-potential team member training
- workplace language training
- departmental trainer programme

Hilton University courses are offered through the Internet, accessible from the comfort of team members' homes or via the hotel's intranet. If team members are not computer literate, the property provides training to ensure that they can benefit from on-line courses. One of the hotel's objectives is for all team members to become computer literate.

With access to a range of training resources from a large international organization and support from head office, HR team members have what they require to meet their daily training needs.

## Implementation Steps:

1. All departments were informed of the new programme to be launched. Departmental involvement was requested from inception.

2. Hilton International head office sent external trainers to train in-house facilitators, training managers, the HR director and other trainers in how to administer the programme.

3. The programme was launched. Team members with high potential were selected from various levels within the hotel using:

- past performance reviews and milestone achievements at the hotel
- psychometric testing:

For team members – a personality questionnaire was used to assess customer service skills.

For supervisory and management levels – a verbal and numerical evaluation test and a personality questionnaire (to assess aspects of personality and leadership competencies) were used.

The assessment tools used to determine the potential of the candidate were from Saville Holdsworth Ltd.

4. A meeting was held with each team member individually so that a personal development plan and career path could be developed to reflect the individual's potential.

5. Each department manager developed a plan of action that the department head focused on with the high-

potential team member.

6. HR team members arranged training programmes internally for team members. They also identified and funded external programmes, including diploma and degree programmes where needed.

7. Monitoring was incorporated into quarterly performance evaluations.

## What Was Done

### *Workplace restructuring*

To address the company's future HR development issues, Hilton International began restructuring and redefining job descriptions within its entire organization in 2000. At the Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre, the organizational restructuring was completed two years ago. This restructuring is part of the hotel's five-year strategic HR plan to prepare the workforce for present and future customer needs.

Specifically, team member roles were redefined. Each department's strategic objective was tied directly to a score card system. This system encourages all team members to work toward strategic objectives and to meet the department's target goals related to people management, quality service, customer satisfaction and profit.

### *Selection and retention*

While job descriptions were restructured and redefined within the hotel, so too was the selection and retention process for new hires. As part of the five-year restructuring process, all new recruits, and those promoted, now have to take selection tests.

### *Hi and Road programmes*

Two programmes developed by Hilton International Americas in 2000 were company-wide initiatives to identify high-potential team members within the organization and to facilitate the development of these individuals at each property. These programmes are:

- Hi – for line-level and supervisory-level team members
- Road (Resourcing Opportunities and Development) – for managers and director-level team members

HR team members at the Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre found that the North American programmes did not suit the Caribbean culture's work and socio-economic setting. To enhance the programmes' success, therefore, they added an individual focus to each of the programmes.

### Results:

There have been a number of promotions at all levels of the organization over the last four years. Every year, the objectives of the HR department are to:

- identify a number of high-potential team members for the Hi and Road programmes
- assist each team member while he/she works toward the next level in his/her individual development plan

### *Staff reactions*

Team members welcomed the new programmes as these provided a clearer picture of career advancement within the local company and within the Hilton chain of hotels. Also, there was the opportunity to take advantage of job openings.

For management, the programme is seen as 'win-win'. It is a motivating tool that develops

the talents of key employees in every department, and it helps to improve overall team morale. Management has to devote extra time to the team members participating in the programme, but it is well worth it as more junior team members are prepared for managerial levels within the organization.

### *Challenges*

The greatest challenge that had to be overcome was the follow through required by department heads. Each department head had a number of new activities identified in their department's plans of action, such as:

- special projects in the department
- cross-exposure to other functions
- mentoring with a colleague in the department and identifying a strength that the team member needs to improve

### *Future HR issues*

The Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre wants to continue to create a more flexible workforce to meet what it feels is one of its biggest HR challenges for the future, that is, management development and succession planning.

Also, over the past two years management has been gradually taking over the role of overseeing staff industrial relations that had been played by a union for the past 37 years. This has been challenging, given both that the union has served in this capacity for so long and that the hotel wants to maintain a collaborative relationship with the union.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to consider customizing any internationally-developed training resource that might be available to a tourism business?
2. The Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre encourages team members to become computer literate and to then take advantage of available on-line training. What would you define as the advantages and disadvantages of Internet-based skills development training?
3. What are some ways that a small- or medium-sized tourism business could incorporate the principle of identifying high-potential employees and then preparing a set of well-defined career path opportunities for them?

# Room Attendants Not Forgotten

## Amaryllis Beach Resort

This resort believes that staff members who feel good about themselves and their job functions can deliver excellent service for the benefit of the business. So when the house-keeping department wanted to improve the status of its room attendants, the HR department invested in a new training programme to give these employees a higher and more appreciated profile, while introducing cleaning practices and products beneficial to the local environment.

Where  
Barbados

### Mission statement

- To provide the highest quality service to our guests, opportunities for total development for our staff and a viable operation for our shareholders

### Type of business

Resort

### Size

- Number of rooms – 150
- Dining room capacity – 330
- Conference room capacity – 200

### Ownership

- Private
- Unionized

### Operating

32 years

### Management structure

- Owner-managed through a management team

### Key products and services

- Accommodation with food and beverage facilities, bars, catering services and function hosting

### Workforce

- 105 full-time
- 3 part-time

### In-house incentive programmes

- Performance incentives
- Employee and supervisor of the quarter
- Employee of the year
- Profit sharing (senior management)

### Awards received

- Green Globe 21 certified

[www.amaryllisbeachresort.com](http://www.amaryllisbeachresort.com)

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## The HR Challenge

Committed to staff development and concerned about preserving the local environment, the Amaryllis Beach Resort faced the challenge of implementing a training programme that improved the status of its housekeeping staff while, at the same time, meeting the resort's environmental principles.

### Overview

It takes a large staff, each skilled in their area of expertise, to operate a resort. Many jobs often receive little recognition from guests or fellow colleagues due to the nature of the work or to negative stereotyping of the occupation. These jobs can include dishwashers and sanitation and cleaning staff. However, these are all essential positions in every hospitality business.

The Amaryllis Beach Resort sought to improve the profile of its room attendants, that is, to raise the employees' low self-esteem regarding the job and themselves by increasing their skill levels and strengthening the importance of housekeeping staff within the resort.

#### *People management practices*

The Amaryllis Beach Resort encourages all staff to develop by providing ongoing training and broad, flexible job descriptions. There is no overstaffing and there is a low staff/rooms ratio throughout the organization.

By keeping the working environment friendly, dynamic and progressive, the Amaryllis Beach Resort has fewer job function issues and little turnover.

Training programmes are considered to be

vital and are thus mandatory for all staff. Management believes its most important HR issues for the future will be acquiring people who are:

- flexible
- skilled in their area of expertise
- genuinely hospitable

The resort offers in-house programmes designed to encourage employee productivity. These programmes include performance incentives impacted by attendance and other measures. Opportunities for upward mobility are also provided as situations arise.

### Implementation Steps:

1. The HR and housekeeping departments agreed that improving the room attendants' morale and job profile were important for the entire organization.
2. A programme that had been successful in the region and that met the resort's environmental concerns was purchased.
3. External trainers trained all housekeeping staff and supervisors during six visits to the resort during a calendar year.
4. The Rooms Division Manager, the Quality Assurance Manager and the external trainers conduct spot checks of guest rooms to monitor performance.
5. Incentives were developed to encourage housekeeping staff to voluntarily apply for room attendant certification.

## What Was Done

The housekeeping department identified the need for a training programme and recommended that the Amaryllis Beach Resort adopt the Talkabout Housekeeping Program that was being used at other properties in the region. Developed by a hospitality and management professional, the programme sets sustainable standards in guest room and public areas for cleanliness, hygiene, safety, staff pride and accountability, with an option of room attendant certification through Talkabout Skills.

### *Housekeeping with a Hint of Green*

The Amaryllis Beach Resort purchased the new hospitality programme and called it Housekeeping Training With A Hint of Green. The objectives of the programme were to:

- make the cleaning standard of room attendants consistently high
- improve the self image of room attendants
- make the cleaning process more efficient and environmentally-friendly

Trainers were brought on-site to teach line staff and supervisors in the housekeeping department. During work hours, in conference facilities and in guest rooms, staff awareness training and sustainable standards were covered in three stages:

- large group activity
- small group activity
- individual activity, i.e., over-the-shoulder and on the job

Using handouts, the actual cleaning agents and demonstrations of real-life cleaning situations, housekeeping attendants learned a new technique called circular room cleaning. This technique involves the use of environ-

mentally-friendly mixtures and general environmental best practices.

Having a genuine concern for the environment and being Green Globe 21 certified, the Amaryllis Beach Resort ensured that its housekeeping attendants understood the importance of its new environmental practices. Monitoring took place to make sure that standards were maintained.

In the final phase of the programme, the Amaryllis Beach Resort will give room attendants the option of becoming certified by Talkabout Skills. Incentives will be offered to encourage staff participation in the certification programme.

## Results:

The programme is still a work-in-progress so the overall results are not completely determined. Over time, the results measuring the increased number of rooms completed per room attendant and the reduced cost of chemicals are expected to offset the cost of the programme (US\$12,500). It is anticipated that the benefits will include:

- increased efficiency in time use
- less use of materials
- better feelings among employees about themselves and their job functions

### *Staff reactions*

Overall, most staff welcomed the new programme. The small amount of initial resistance was soon overcome as the programme was clearly shown to benefit staff.

### *Challenges*

The greatest obstacle was scheduling training. As all housekeeping staff needed to be trained, training sessions were staggered and scheduled around busy periods.

## Key lessons for smaller operations

For small- and medium-size operations wanting to implement a similar programme, the Amaryllis Beach Resort has these suggestions:

- Train small numbers at a time.
- Proceed methodically.
- Consider joining with other similar businesses to reduce the per unit cost.
- Every function is important and people have to be made to feel important.

## Discussion Questions

1. Room attendants at the Amaryllis Beach Resort were provided with important knowledge and skills that were part of the hotel's Green Globe business strategy. What additional kinds of learning opportunities would be appropriate to provide to housekeeping staff?

2. There is always the need to consider the financial resources required when providing additional support for staff. Why should this kind of innovative training be seen as a business investment as opposed to a questionable cost?

3. What other departments of a resort property can benefit from increasing staff knowledge and skills relating to environment-friendly practices?

# Raising Guest Satisfaction Levels

## Sandals Ocho Rios Resort & Golf Club

Providing Extra-ordinary Guest Service (PEGS) is a Sandals original programme that was conceived and developed by in-house team members (staff) to raise guest comment scores for service at this resort.



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Where  
Jamaica

### Mission statement

- Sandals is committed, through teamwork and staff development, to increasing staff profitability, maintaining consistent standards of quality and providing the highest level of guest satisfaction possible

### Type of business

- Resort
- Private sector

### Size

- Number of rooms – 237
- Dining room capacity – 394

### Ownership

- Private
- Not unionized

Operating  
15 years

### Management structure

- Owner-managed

### Key products and services

- All-inclusive accommodation with gourmet restaurants, golf, various water sports and fitness centre

### Workforce

- Peak: 327 full-time, 28 part-time
- Off-season: 288 full-time, 26 part-time

### In-house incentive programmes

- Discounts with various local businesses
- Savings and loan club
- Pension, medical and life insurance
- Incentive trips (local and overseas)
- Monthly, quarterly and yearly awards
- Inter-departmental and inter-hotel sporting competitions

### Awards received

- Top Caribbean Hotel Group (UK Travel Industry)
- Signature Vacations Award for Excellence Service (4 years)
- World's Leading All-inclusive Company (World Travel Awards)

[www.sandals.com](http://www.sandals.com)

## The HR Challenge

Concerned that guest comments for service were not reaching the minimum 95 per cent rating, the HR department at the Sandals Ocho Rios Resort & Golf Club created a new in-house service excellence programme to improve its customer service training. They called the programme Providing Extraordinary Guest Service – PEGS for short.

Before PEGS could be implemented throughout the property, department heads were faced with the challenge of how to sell the programme's concepts to team members (staff). The key was to inform all team members about the benefits to be gained personally and for the hotel. Once this was accomplished, greater levels of prompt and efficient service followed.

## Overview

'A little taste of Eden' is how Sandals Ocho Rios Resort & Golf Club describes what a stay in this Jamaica resort resembles. Nestled between the lush St. Ann Mountains and the Caribbean Sea, it is a sanctuary for couples. When guest comments regarding the resort's service were ranked at 80 per cent rather than the minimum standard set at 95 per cent, the HR department felt its paradise travel escape was not fully meeting guests' expectations and developed PEGS.

### PEGS

PEGS incorporates the five basic components of the existing Sandals Quality Advantage Programme:

1. Total Customer Focus
2. Total Commitment
3. Job Knowledge
4. Team Work
5. Continuous Improvement

The Sandals Ocho Rios Resort's HR and training departments made sure that every department head understood the resort's goal for implementing PEGS. When selling PEGS to team members, department heads explained how the new programme would benefit individuals personally as well as how the hotel and the community would profit.

### The benefits of implementing PEGS for: Team members –

During work hours, individuals would learn new customer service skills that would increase their occupational skills knowledge. These skills, although developed specifically for Sandals, are also valuable for résumés and when starting a new business.

### The hotel –

Satisfied clients make for repeat clientele and good word-of-mouth advertising. A hotel with no, or next-to-no, vacancies needs a full- and part-time workforce, which means steady employment.

### The local community –

A popular resort benefits the community as tourists buy goods and ancillary services from the surrounding area. Local residents own many businesses, which in turn support family, friends and the economic livelihood of the community.

Those departments that had received lower-than-expected ratings on service were anxious to be a part of the programme. Selling team members on the programme was easy when the benefits for individual employees, for the hotel and for the community were fully understood.

## Implementation Steps:

1. An enhanced training programme for front-line, supervisory and management team members was developed in-house, incorporating the corporate office's Sandals Quality Advantage Programme.

2. The resort's training manager trained all department heads in the programme's components and sought buy-in by explaining the benefits related to individuals, to departments and to the resort as a whole.

3. Department heads explained the programme's concept to supervisors and front-line team members. During work schedules, the training manager provided instruction to team member groups using audio-visual materials, role-playing and prepared hand-outs. Outside professionals were brought in for motivational presentations.

4. Monitoring was done through a programme called TLC and a weekly guest questionnaire review.

5. Weekly training sessions continued over the long term to ensure that guest satisfaction results remained in the mid-90s.

with guests had a major input. Suggestions from team members on ways of improving service scores were incorporated.

The remaining 10 per cent – covering the technical components – was outsourced to a team of experts.

Pre-shift briefings let all team members become familiar with the programme. Over a period of six weeks, the entire programme was implemented throughout the resort.

A total of 20 group training sessions were needed for team members to be completely trained in the programme's 13 modules, covering:

- Creating Great First Impressions
- Customer Expectations and How to Satisfy Them
- Successful Bartending
- Dining Room Skills
- Great Dining and Bar Service
- Customer Service is Everybody's Business
- How to Give Delightful Guest Service
- Customer Service Sensitization
- Customer Relations
- Community and Environmental Awareness
- Winning Words
- Cultural Sensitivity
- Tourism Awareness

Local motivational speakers were brought in to speak in some group sessions. Customer service videos were borrowed from a local hospitality college and used in some training sessions. Titles of the videos borrowed included:

- Anticipating the Customer's Needs
- Putting the Customer First
- Smile
- Becoming a Service Star
- Pleasing the Challenging Customer

## What Was Done

Ninety per cent of this new service excellence programme was developed in-house from the expertise of the team members on staff. All departments that deal directly

## Selection and retention

The HR department has a selection process that is used to screen applicants who apply for positions at the resort. This process is based on a range of minimum requirements that differ depending on the area of work.

During the interview process, the HR department looks for candidates with the desired service attitude. Learning the specific job skills begins after orientation, and further training is ongoing throughout a team member's career at the resort.

At the Ocho Rios Resort & Golf Club, a team member can expect to receive continuous training and the opportunity for:

- promotions from within
- transfers to other Sandals or Beaches properties
- scholarships and fellowships to local and overseas post-secondary institutions
- exchange programmes in similar capacities at other Jamaican resorts

These incentives are some of the reasons why the resort has low turnover and little difficulty in retaining team members.

## Additional learning opportunities

For those candidates seeking to further their management careers, Sandals Ocho Rios Resort & Golf Club offers a Trainee Manager's Programme overseen by the HR director. Eligible candidates are those with a Bachelor of Science degree from a tertiary institution. The programme is two years in length, with on-the-job training throughout the Sandals/Beaches chain.

Further team-building exercises for team members at all levels include the Sandals

Ocho Rios quiz, covering local and overseas Sandals/Beaches properties, customer service and Jamaican history and culture. The quiz is known as the Sandals All Star Competition, and there are group fun days throughout the Sandals chain that promote friendly competition.

Each team member is expected to meet a mandatory number of training hours per year in customer service, technical skills and other personal development educational programmes, such as:

- Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) in English and Mathematics
- Caribcert – CHA Certification
- First Aid
- Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)

This training is a factor considered when evaluations are done and possible promotions and transfers are examined.

## Staying ahead of competitors

The Sandals Ocho Rios property manager does all the daily training with team members and uses guest presenters when required. Cross-training between departments is an important component, as it enables properties to fill vacancies from within. This also acts as a powerful motivational tool for employees. Team members become more marketable as they learn new skills. By continuously investing in training throughout the resort chain, Sandals is confident that it is able to stay ahead of its competitors.

## Results:

During the implementation stages, guest satisfaction scores slowly but steadily improved. They reached the mid-90s in the fourth week after PEGS was completely implemented throughout the resort. As a result of this success, a portion of PEGS

is now used at other Sandals and Beaches properties.

### *Monitoring*

Monitoring is two-fold at the Ocho Rios Resort. There is the existing TLC programme, where managers make courtesy calls to in-house guests. It has been shown that these calls help to improve guest service scores as concerns are dealt with prior to a guest's departure.

There is also a weekly guest questionnaire review not only to focus on areas of concern but also to highlight outstanding achievements in guest service. This review specifically helps the training managers to monitor PEGS' success.

The questionnaire is a summary of all guest comment cards by area and is compiled into a weekly report by the Guest Services Department.

This report is then discussed in departmental team members' regular two-hour meetings. During these sessions, departmental team members discuss and arrive at effective, workable solutions to documented guest comments and concerns. For example, following comments about the unavailability of food during the early morning, the beach grill had its opening hours moved to 6:30 A.M. Early continental breakfast was also instituted, starting at 7:30 A.M.

Department heads also discuss these solutions with front-line team members in their daily pre-shift briefings. Copies of the report that the Guest Services Department compiles, along with the solutions and any subsequent changes in hotel operations, are posted on the departmental notice boards

and in staff areas.

Written communication to guests who have expressed concerns is undertaken directly by the hotel manager.

### *Challenges*

The biggest obstacles to overcome while implementing PEGS were employee buy-in and scheduling training sessions during busy high-occupancy periods. Having shorter training sessions and repeating the topic over the entire week in both morning and evening sessions overcame this second obstacle.

The majority of team members welcomed the new programme. However, there were a few who were initially sceptical. Once enthusiasm grew and team members were instructed in the benefits, more team members came on board.

### *Future HR issues*

Filling key roles in its food and beverage departments is the resort's most important HR issue for the future. To address this, the resort is one of the corporate representatives on local school boards. The resort also works with local hospitality schools by visiting institutions and sensitizing students to the various career and personal growth opportunities available in the hospitality industry.

Students are also invited for property tours of the resort so that they can get a first-hand view of the operations. The Ocho Rios Resort & Golf Club has created an on-the-job training programme for teens to be exposed to all areas of the hotel's operation. The programme helps students to acquire new skills and to develop an appreciation for tourism in the community and in Jamaica's

economy. This programme helps to fill key food and beverage positions by heightening interest in this choice of career.

### *Key lessons for smaller operations*

For small and medium-size operations wanting to implement similar programmes, the resort has these suggestions:

Ensure that all your employees understand:

- the importance (on an individual level) of repeat and increased business
- how to deliver prompt and efficient service in all guest-host interactions

## Discussion Questions

1. Selling the employees on the PEGS programme was a key consideration in its successful implementation. What are some of the personal benefits that employees would enjoy from actively engaging in a programme such as PEGS?
2. Scheduling training is often a significant challenge in busy hospitality and tourism properties. What are some ways to ensure that in-house customer service training gets the attention it requires?
3. What ideas do you have that will support the ongoing reinforcement of customer-service strategies, such as those in the PEGS programme, once the initial training has been completed?