

BUSINESS SECTOR: HOSPITALITY
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 86
REGION: LONDON

Located in the ever-fashionable Marylebone Village, the four-star deluxe Mandeville Hotel prides itself on the personalised service offered to guests. Train to Gain is helping the hotel to differentiate itself from the competition by driving up customer service levels higher than ever before.



“Participating in the Train to Gain programme is resulting in improvements right across our business. I would definitely recommend it to other employers.”

Emese Szanti
 Human Resources Manager
 Mandeville Hotel

The challenge

Following an extensive refurbishment, in 2005 the Mandeville Hotel was upgraded to become a four-star luxury establishment. Human Resources Manager Emese Szanti said: “Becoming a four-star deluxe property was an enormous change and challenge that meant we had to raise our standards at every level and across all departments.

“Before starting the Train to Gain programme our heads of department had been focusing mainly on their own particular areas and were doing a great job already. We wanted to equip them with new management tools, enable them to refresh their existing skills and knowledge, and inspire them to work together as a team in growing the business.”

Customer service can often be the differentiator for discerning guests at the high end of the hotel market. Two years ago a number of employees completed National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training in customer service and management, which helped improve their day-to-day dealings with guests. Emese said: “We were very keen to repeat this training, and to extend it to more people across all departments of the hotel.”

English is the second language for around 80 per cent of the hotel’s employees. “Having a good command of English is a key part of our selection criteria,” she added, “but there’s always room for improvement. We knew that helping our international employees to understand more about topics like intonation, grammar and specific hospitality expressions would boost their confidence, enabling them to provide customer service at a higher level.”

The solution

Embarking on the Train to Gain programme couldn’t have been easier. “Based on the initial meetings and assessment of our business requirements, our broker suggested an Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) Level 2 training course for our managers, assistant managers and supervisors,” said Emese. “They have all since seized this opportunity.

“Also, all heads of department – myself included – are undergoing ILM Level 3 management training. Many of us have a formal education and considerable experience already, but we were very keen to improve and refresh this. We are really benefiting from the opportunity to learn about new management tools, and are using

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personality profiles for management and recruitment purposes. Communication and teamwork have both improved and we are learning how to increase the long-term profitability of the business by raising financial awareness."

To date, eight employees have been assessed and completed the induction course for the NVQ Level 2 customer service course. Emese said: "The brokers have extensive knowledge and experience of the hospitality industry. Therefore they were instantly able to identify our business needs and what our people should focus on in order to improve their performance. Over the coming months, our employees will be undergoing training, workplace assignments and in-house assessments to help them achieve their NVQ Level 2."

The opportunity to study English as a second language (ESOL) went down a storm with the workforce. Emese said: "The response was amazing: more than 40 people participated in the initial assessment for the ESOL training, from all parts of the business. They can't wait for the training to start, and are really positive about this opportunity."

The results

It's still very early days in terms of implementing the comprehensive Train to Gain package but visible improvements are already starting to filter through. With the customer service and ESOL training about to commence, employees are already more motivated in their daily work and are showing a greater commitment to the hotel and the business.

"Since we've started the ILM training, there's been a significant change in

managerial approach and performance," said Emese. "We're working much more effectively as a team now, supporting our General Manager and each other. The training has inspired us to share ideas more and to be more creative in tackling challenges. We also have a better knowledge of the financial side of the business and how we can affect the revenue of the hotel through our job."

The results are impressive. More comment cards are being collected from guests and translated into service improvements. The average room rate has increased, which is having a knock-on effect on profitability. And Emese is introducing new HR procedures, including training and career plans, which she is confident will have a positive impact on recruitment and retention.

"Train to Gain has re-energised our business," said Emese. "It's excellent that we've been given these training opportunities because our people are definitely more enthusiastic and achieving more in their daily work. Our General Manager's support and acknowledgement helps us to stay motivated and committed to our job and to the Mandeville Hotel. Our standards are improving all the time, which I'm sure will help us achieve our ultimate goal: consistently providing five-star customer service to our guests."

What is Train to Gain?

Train to Gain is a new service to help employers get the training they need to succeed. Based on the highly successful Employer Training Pilots, the service offers businesses a free, impartial skills analysis, plus access to relevant training and available funding.

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