THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING

By Dr Vikneswaran Nair & Dalilah Tamrin

The vitality of training and retraining the hospitality workforce.

“Service” is the key word to success in the hospitality industry. Service is also the one ingredient that ensures repeat clientele. Training and retraining enable your staff to provide the quality of service demanded by your guests, and quality is the key to a larger share of the market in a competitive environment.

Hospitality organisations face the special challenge of training not only for the required job or task skills but to teach employees how to interact positively with guests and how to solve inevitable problems creatively.

Five key factors that customers use to judge the overall quality of service are well defined by Dr Len Berry, the guru for Customer Satisfaction (Table 1).

A training department’s mission is to provide quality continuing education for professional practice, retraining, and self-development, which anticipate and respond to community needs and the effects of social and technological changes. A Continuing Professional Education (CPE) programme is one of the most important channels that can offer access to its human, physical and technological resources for the advancement of society.

Although the average company that trains spends an amount equal to 1.5% of its payroll on training-related efforts, the best organisation spends a lot more. The Ritz-Carton Hotel, for example, provides at least 120 hours of training per employee each year. Holiday Inn Worldwide spends more than twice as much on training as most other hotel companies. The return on that training investment is a drop in guest complaints in some hotels from 200 per month to three, with simultaneous revenue increase of 15%.

HOSPITALITY & TOURISM INDUSTRY

The hospitality industry in Malaysia has been striving its best to survive and stay ahead despite the stiff business competition and volatile market situations caused by various uncontrollable factors, which include the virus outbreaks, political instabilities, and economic turbulences.

The Government’s move in introducing Malaysia via the ‘Malaysia, Truly Asia’ campaign has shown the country’s vast tourism assets that include the beautiful tropical jungles, forests, beaches, marine parks, mangroves, mountains, cities and rural life, and eateries, shopping and places of entertainment. All these are nonetheless meaningless without our ‘mostly talked about’ hospitality and friendliness that shine naturally in the diverse society.

As such, hospitality players along with the Government have taken a crucial move to ensure that

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIVE KEY FACTORS CUSTOMERS USE TO JUDGE THE OVERALL QUALITY OF SERVICE</th>
<th>(Defined by Dr Len Berry, the Guru for Customer Satisfaction)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RELIABILITY</strong></td>
<td>The willingness of the organisation and its employees to deliver service consistently, reliably and accurately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESPONSIVENESS</strong></td>
<td>The willingness of the organisation and its employees to provide prompt service and help customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASSURANCE</strong></td>
<td>The employees’ knowledge, courtesy and ability to convey trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EMPATHY</strong></td>
<td>The employees’ willingness to provide caring and individualised attention to each customer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TANGIBLES</strong></td>
<td>The appearance of the service employee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
provided by their staff meet the customers’ needs and expectations. In some hotels, they do not merely preach and practise meeting the customers’ needs and expectations but they also continue doing what is ‘above and beyond’. To them it has become their creed and business belief.

The needs to ensure the sustainable and continuous supply of the hospitality product-service mix are supplemented with the increased numbers of colleges, schools and universities that offer hospitality and tourism certificates, diplomas and degrees for the various levels of human capital required to run the hospitality establishments.

**TRAINING**

Some of the premier private and public institutions of higher learning, namely Taylor’s College, School of Hospitality and Tourism, Sunway College, INTI College, Institut Tun Abdul Razak (ITTAR), Kolej Damansara Utama (KDU), Universiti Institut Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) and others that offer hospitality courses have started making changes to their curriculum to tailor it to the industry’s requirements and market needs.

Hence, hotels in Malaysia are supplied with candidates who are equipped with the right skills or technical abilities and academic qualifications as these academic institutions continue to provide the platform for the students to be able to shoulder the challenges in the real world.

Nevertheless, as the hospitality business grows in a rapidly changing world, hospitality operators need to continuously adapt and be adept to the customers’ buying behaviour and decision-making changes and still be able to meet their needs or produce the ‘above and beyond’ services.

In view of this notion, hotel operators need to work hand-in-hand with academic institutions or brush up their human resource departments so that they synchronise their move in developing and improving the necessary skills, abilities and qualifications of the hospitality workforce.

It is undeniably vital for hotel operators to consider training and retraining the workforce as one the internal strategic focuses for maintaining or upgrading their business positions.

While the academic institutions continue to provide the necessary platform for the hospitality workforce, the hotel operators themselves should begin evaluating their employees. They provide both the technical or hard-skill training and business-skill or soft-skill training programmes as they understand the importance of instilling effective business analytical abilities for their managers.

**THE HIAS PROGRAMME**

The HIAS (Hotel Industry Apprenticeship Scheme) programme is designed to increase the market of skilled workforce in the hospitality industry.

Taylor’s College, School of Hospitality and Tourism (TOHT), which developed the programme’s training manuals, currently used nationwide, is also an approved training provider for HIAS since 1997.

The apprentices are sourced from schools and the public. The hotels need only make a pledge of the number of apprentices they would like to sponsor for HIAS programme.

The apprentices will spend half the duration of the programme at the training providers and the other half at the sponsoring hotel.

Upon completion, Majlis Latihan Vokasional Kebangsaan (MLVK) will award the apprentices the Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia (SKM) Level 2.

The sponsoring hotel will then employ them for a minimum period of one year.

**Contact person:**

Mr Adzan Amri (603-7877977 ext. 313).
The focus of the training programmes has changed from merely technical to combining hard- and soft-skills training. The perception that technical skills alone would be sufficient to guarantee an employee candidate a job placement in a hotel or to secure a staff a job promotion has started to evade. Hospitality organisations should follow Dr Len Berry’s five training principles in developing an effective training strategy (Table 2).

In today’s market conditions, customers are more educated and demanding. The customers face difficulty making a distinction amongst the hotels’ product-service mix, and where the hotel’s pie is shrinking in size, the hoteliers have begun shaping their employees’ skills and abilities and tailoring them to their customers’ needs and demands. The customers in the current business environment are unwilling to compromise on sloppy services. They have even demanded that hotels align the customers’ changing buying behaviour and decision-making with the way hotel operators do their business.

Critically noted, customers do not want to be thrown to so many people when they face a problem in a hotel. Many customers are generating their loyalty status based on the cumulative experiences they have with a hotel.

In short, they note, assess and weigh each of their experiences with a particular hotel, and what makes it worse is when they do not keep bad experiences (whether single or cumulative) to themselves. They share it with other people and they share it so well that they sometimes manage to influence their audience. At this stage, the hotel is at stake; it may face losing reputation or may face difficulty retaining existing customers or even face difficulties getting new customers if their employees continue to offer a slipshod service.

To produce excellent service to the customers, it is important to read, know and understand the customers. It can only be done prior to the delivery of the services itself. This ability is rather subjective and requires initiative to probe, analyse and think what is best offered to the customers. This process occurs in all sections of the hotel operations: from the front office, to the restaurant and to the banquet sales.

Therefore, in a simple way of understanding training and retraining, it is like developing, polishing and improving the skills and abilities that the employees have. It is not a one-time but a lifetime education, so training should be provided from the moment they step out of college life to the current moment when they hold a position in a hotel establishment.

Retraining is often made available to employees who have burned out, have become unable to perform their current jobs because of technological developments, or whose jobs have been eliminated. Retraining is important for employees who have become disenchanted with their present job or otherwise lost their passion. In the retraining programme, they can retrain for new jobs that might recapture their enthusiasm or rethink why they are unhappy with their existing jobs, to regain the spirit of doing in the way the guest expects.

The hotel industry in Malaysia is backed by the Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) as this association has its training and education centre that has embarked on offering both the hard-skill and soft-skill training programmes for the hospitality employees.

The association notes the happenings in the industry and is aware
Agri-food:
WHERE THE MONEY IS

Exclusive:
Tobacco Industry Shake-up

Bird Flu:
Why Malaysia Spared?

Khind Holdings:
Brand Strategy Pays

Brand Building:
M'sian Companies Unprepared?