

CASE STUDY

The Quality Inn Northern Grand

LEARNED TO COMMUNICATE THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING



IN BRIEF

Background

The Quality Inn Northern Grand in Fort St. John, British Columbia, is a full service, 125-room hotel including conference facilities, a restaurant and lounge. The hotel started partnering with Signature for training solutions in 1999.

Challenges

The hotel felt customer service training was important for all employees, not just for the frontline. They needed to create buy-in from these employees, create consistency in the training program across departments and make sure the program stayed fresh and interesting over time.

Solutions

Signature implemented Service Edge™ to teach employees a Magic Formula for enhancing each guest's experience. The program is fun and engaging and included an ongoing and flexible reinforcement program to keep employees enthusiastic between sessions and interested over time. The dedication of the Northern Grand management team played a big part in keeping the program a priority and long-term success.

Results

The Quality Inn Northern Grand was named the 2005 Canadian Hotel of the Year by Choice Hotels Canada. Selected from over 280 hotels, Northern Grand was chosen because of its extraordinary customer service and impeccably maintained property. Because of the training, employees were more confident in the importance of their roles and worked together to continually provide the exceptional service for which they are known.

Background

The Quality Inn Northern Grand (Northern Grand) in Fort St. John, British Columbia, is a member of the Choice Hotels Canada system, and is managed by Atlific Hotels and Resorts.

A full-service hotel including conference facilities, restaurant and lounge, Northern Grand offers 125 rooms to business and leisure travelers. The organization takes great pride in being known for its exceptional customer service, and since 1999 the hotel and its management company, Atlific, have committed to maintaining that reputation by utilizing Signature customer service training programs for all of its employees.

Challenges

Present a Program for All Employees: When Atlific decided to implement a customer service training program, Northern Grand wanted a program that was appropriate for all employees, not just those in traditional customer-facing roles. The housekeeping, maintenance and kitchen staff in particular were skeptical of the need for customer service training since they rarely interacted with customers.

Maintain Consistency Across the Organization: In order to create a truly guest-centric culture, management knew they must send a consistent message to all employees, new and old, no matter what department, so they would work in concert with one another to truly impact the guest experience.

Keep the Program Fresh and Interesting Over Time: Many employees had been with Northern Grand for years. As effective as the Signature program may be, it was important to keep it fresh and new for employees who go through the training year after year, or run the risk of employees becoming bored and the program losing its impact.

The Solution

Service Edge™ Training: Based on the success the hotel had with other Signature programs, Northern Grand requested Service Edge to teach employees a simple Magic Formula for greeting guests, solving problems and enhancing each guest's overall experience.

Service Edge training sessions were energetic, informative and fun, complete with incentives and group interaction. The hotel held several training sessions a year



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to maintain the high level of enthusiasm employees felt after leaving each session.

Management positioned training as a benefit and required all employees to go through the Service Edge program, regardless of their role. The program emphasized the importance of each person's part in providing exceptional guest service.

Flexible Reinforcement Program: Signature's program utilized a reinforcement system that featured ongoing coaching, mystery shopping and management reporting. The program supported Northern Grand's incentive programs to encourage employees to excel, keeping them engaged and enthusiastic between training sessions.

The Signature reinforcement program gave experienced employees follow-up training and taught new employees the same Magic Formula and service skills, ensuring consistency in all employees' behaviors. The program was flexible enough to allow for various modules to be added depending on the group, so long-term employees may have received a slightly different program than new employees in order to keep the program fresh and interesting.

Management Dedication: Atlific Hotels understood the importance of creating a service culture and how it could ultimately impact the hotel's revenue, so it installed training in most of its western Canada hotels. Management at Northern Grand in particular was dedicated to making this program a success and was able to encourage employee buy-in, communicate the importance of the training, and support the Signature program for optimal results.

Results

2005 Canadian Hotel of the Year: The Quality Inn Northern Grand was named the 2005 Canadian Hotel of the Year by Choice Hotels Canada (CHC). The hotel was selected from more than 280 Choice Hotels across Canada for its "operating philosophy that calls for an impeccably maintained property and extraordinary customer service," according to Choice Canada President Mike Jackson.

While Northern Grand excelled across the board, General

Manager Cheryl Erickson attributed some of her success to the Signature program. "Working with Signature definitely helped us achieve this award," she said. "The program made everyone aware that they had the ability to impact a guest's stay and Signature provided the right training and the right trainers. Our partnership was much appreciated," she added.

Increased Confidence: The consistency and simplicity of the Magic Formula made providing exceptional service easy for hotel employees. "The consistency took the pressure off the trainees and gave them the confidence to know how to act in certain situations. When the guests reacted favorably, it continued to build our employees' desire to stick with the formula," Erickson said. "The ability to interact with and be recognized by the customers truly made the employees take even more pride in the important role they play for the hotel!"

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Collective Customer Service Goals: Erickson believed the collective goal of exceptional customer service created a family-like atmosphere that recognized the importance of each individual's contribution.

While initially, some employees didn't understand why they would need training if they did not deal with customers, they came to understand how each employee truly impacted a guest experience. Housekeeping and maintenance teams went out of their way to say "good morning" to guests and ask how their stay was going. Guests were often surprised and always pleased.

The training program helped emphasize how important each department is to the overall success of the hotel. Erickson stated, "It's changed everyone's attitude toward each others' roles. Those who weren't on the frontline were now proponents of supporting the frontline in any way they could. On the flip side, the frontline realized how important that support was to our overall success. It was a true collaboration."

