

Staff Motivation and Empowerment

- Staff Motivation
 - Training
 - Cross-training
 - Recognition
 - Communication
 - Incentive Programmes
 - Performance Appraisals
 - Staff Empowerment
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Staff Motivation

As Kasavana remarks the term “motivation” can mean various things, but in our context it is –

the art of stimulating a front office staff member’s interest in a particular job, project, or subject to the extent that he or she is challenged to be continuously attentive, observant, concerned and committed.

There are various motivational techniques:

Training

Training is seen by many as one of the most effective ways to motivate employees – primarily because it is a way of informing employees that management truly cares enough to provide the necessary instruction and direction to ensure their success.

Cross-training

Cross-training simply means teaching an employee job functions other than those he or she was hired to perform. It has advantages for both the employee and the employer: the employee acquires additional skill which may help in his professional development, the employer gains flexibility in scheduling.

Recognition

Guest, managerial and peer recognition are strong staff motivators. Staff should be aware of all positive guest comments, especially those comments left in guest questionnaires. Management may offer incentives to staff who are favourably recognised by guests. In some cases recognition is given through an employee-of-the-month programme which gives the opportunity for managers and sometimes employees to select an employee for special

mention. Usually an employee qualifies for this honour by demonstrating extraordinary commitment to the hotel, its standards and its goals.

Communication

Keeping employees informed about front office operations helps produce positive results. A front office newsletter or bulletin can be an excellent way to establish and maintain formal communications. Some items which may find themselves into the newsletter or bulletin include:

- Job opening announcements
- Promotion, transfer, resignation and retirement announcements
- New recruit announcements
- Performance tips
- Special recognition awards
- Birthday, marriage, engagement and birth announcements
- Upcoming event information

Incentive programmes

Incentive programmes offer special recognition and rewards to employees who have met certain performance standards or defined goals. They may include commendation letters, certificates of appreciation, recognition dinners or events, gift certificates, complimentary weekend packages, special parking privileges, recognition plaques. The choice of incentive will depend on the recognition being given, but the reward must not be arbitrary. All staff members should be given the opportunity to participate and must be fully aware of what is required from them to be eligible for the incentive awards.

Performance Appraisals

Front office staff need to feel secure with respect to their job performance. When properly conducted, a performance appraisal can provide each member of staff with written feedback on his or her performance. Moreover, it must be able to identify both strengths and weaknesses in performance and provide plans and actions for improvement. As part of the appraisal, the manager and the employee must be able to agree on specific goals and target dates. The appraisal must recognise outstanding performance and the appraiser (i.e. the manager) must commit himself to assisting the employee in his professional developments. As Kasavana suggests "Performance appraisals should be fair, objective, informative, and positive." Employees should receive an appraisal at least once a year.

Staff Empowerment

Employee empowerment is particularly relevant in the hospitality industry because employees have the greatest amount of direct customer contact. Levels of customer satisfaction can be increased by *empowering* employees to handle guest requests or problems immediately, rather than having to their supervisors or managers every time.

Empowerment means that the employee will be able to take an independent autonomous decision on how to deal with a particular situation, a decision that may not necessarily be the same one taken by his immediate supervisor or manager but a decision which must be respected nonetheless.

If it is the manager's duty to deal with guest problems why should a member of staff be involved?

There are a number of reasons why in certain situations it would be best if the supervisor or manager were directly involved, but there may be situations where it would be best to allow an employee an amount of discretion to deal with a particular situation.

Ideally, a hotel should have an employee empowerment scheme allowing for structured empowerment – i.e. a scheme that will give structured guidelines to making decisions. The following is an example of such a scheme.

| Guest complaint | Authorised action |
|---|--|
| 1. A guest announces during check out that he experienced a room-related problem. | Offer upgrade for next visit, or adjust current bill by as much as Lm50.00 |
| 2. A guest is charged an incorrect rate. | Adjust rate if it appears incorrect from all correspondence. Ask supervisor to make adjustment. |

Other hotels may adopt a more flexible approach giving a wider discretion to staff, but this depends on other factors, including the reliability of employees to take a reasonable decision.

Whichever the type of employee empowerment strategy is put into place the benefits are the same:

1. Customer satisfaction increases.
2. Cooperation increases as managers and employees work together as a team.
3. Managers are interrupted less as frontline employees make more decisions without managerial input.
4. Employees are "forced" to become more responsible.

5. Employees experience personal growth and development as they learn to make on-the-job decisions.
6. Employee satisfaction increases due to greater feelings of involvement and importance, and improved personal relationships among co-workers.

(Source: Go et al, Human Resource Management in the Hospitality Industry Wiley, 1996)

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