

How to Get Hospitality Staff Engaged in Training.

By Caroline Cooper

Sunday, 31st July 2011

There's nothing more frustrating for a trainer to see a sea of glum faces in front of them, and know that the minute the delegates walk out of the meeting room it will be back to business as normal, acting on nothing they've heard in the training.

And when staff training is so important to ensure consistency and a great guest experience how can you get hospitality staff engaged in training?

Well, as I heard one person say recently "make the training engaging". It seems the obvious answer doesn't it, but just how do we do this?

Planning

Before the training begins plan ahead. Check that the training is in the right format for the objectives you need to achieve (you do know what you want to achieve, don't you?) It is useful to think of your objectives in actionable terms. "To understand the importance of the new health and safety policy" means nothing. What do you want people to do differently as a result of the training?

Ensure that only those who need the training and will have an opportunity to put it into practice are invited to the session; who wants to sit through training that is a repeat of what they have already done, irrelevant to their job, or insults their intelligence as they are already doing what the training is intended to achieve?

Choose your trainer wisely. Sometimes the person most qualified on a topic is not necessarily the best person to communicate it. I'm sure we can all remember the boffin lecturers at college, who quite frankly bore you to death with the detail and the delivery. Can you appoint a champion for the topic within the team who is able to distil the key messages and communicate these?

Keep in mind delegates' schedules and personal circumstances when scheduling the training. And give plenty of warning. I conducted some training recently for a small hotel where one of the delegates had already done a 9 hour shift and then could hardly keep his eyes open.

Another part timer - a student - was on teaching practice and had to come in straight from school, and then go home and do marking. And on another occasion recently one of my delegates had made arrangements to meet friends to celebrate her birthday, but was told the day before about the training and that if she did not attend she'd lose her part time job! Not exactly the best way to engage staff in training.

Ensure why they know they are attending. This means relating it to a personal benefit; will it

make their job easier, quicker, safer or more interesting?

Will it put them in a better position to progress to a new role they aspire to? Will it give them more confidence and independence in their role? You don't need to ignore the business benefits, but help them identify what's in it for them too, so at least they turn up to the training with a bit of enthusiasm.

Format

Any training needs a format to make it easy to follow. We are all familiar with the structure of tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, tell them what you've just told them. And it does work. Sign posting at the start, giving the detail, and then summarising at the end to help to reinforce the message. Bear in mind that people remember most what they see or hear first and last, so give a powerful opening, and end with what you want people to take away.

If training on a complex subject it's best to start with the familiar and build up to the more complex ideas. You don't want to lose people in the first 5 minutes!

Add variety. Do something different to what people are used to to make it interesting or memorable. Conduct the training outside, bring in some actors (great for interpersonal skills training), use music, alter the room or room layout, bring in guest speakers, conduct team exercises that make it competitive (but in a fun way, with fun prizes), use unusual props.

Involve the group

There's nothing worse than a chalk and talk 'lecture'. Get everyone's involvement as much as possible. Start with an ice breakers to get everyone relaxed, but also ask what they want to get out of the training. Ask for their opinions, run exercises, either in groups, or individually.

Add in energiser activities and 'right brain' exercises to break up the session. People hate role plays, but make these less intimidating by running in small coaching groups with another delegate acting as observer in each group.

Make full use of the senses. Make use of mental pictures too, ask the group to image the scene when..... And use stories to illustrate your points. We're all familiar with death by PowerPoint. If you feel compelled to use slides then keep them to a minimum, and use pictures (photos, not clipart) to help to illustrate your points, and limit the words on your slides. Flip charts are more interactive, and great for capturing the delegates ideas.

But at the end of the day a visual is just visual, so try and bring in all the senses. Use props and live examples that people can touch, smell and even taste if appropriate. So if for example you are talking about upselling on a dish or on a particular wine, enable the group to taste the dish or wine and say how they would describe it.

What next?

You don't want people to leave the training session asking "what was all that about then?" Make it clear what you want to happen as a result of the training.

Start by checking their understanding of the key points, but then ask for their ideas on how they are going to implement what they have learnt. And involve everyone in this and if appropriate record this and make them accountable. After all you want to see something happen as a result of the training or it's all been for nothing.

Caroline Cooper is a business coach with over 25 years' experience in business and leadership development, and founder of Zeal Coaching, specializing in working with hospitality businesses, and is author of the 'Hotel Success Handbook'. She is also creator of the Foundations in Leadership online leadership programme for hospitality managers, bringing a brand new approach to hospitality leadership development.