



Two Organizations Working Toward One Identifiable Service culture

ORGANIZATION DETAILS:

Casino

INDUSTRY:

Gaming and Entertainment

SIZE:

12,000 staff

OTHER:

- Seventh largest US casino operator
- 15 locations in the US
- International locations in the Bahamas and UK
- AMEX listed
- 10 years in business
- Target market: middle aged, middle income

The purchase of another casino doubled the size of this organization. During the merger both properties needed to be integrated into an identifiable service culture. This involved tackling two major challenges; high staff turnover (typical of this industry) and ensuring the management style of both organizations aligned with their new brand elements

OBJECTIVES

Overall objectives for all properties were:

- Spark a branded style of customer service that would be delivered consistently throughout all its properties. Emphasize a distinct culture across all newly acquired properties.
- Ensure the effective delivery of the personal side of customer service as a key business strategy.
- Teach personal customer service skills and attitudes that would inspire all frontline employees to implement specifically defined customer service skills and behaviors.
- Inspire the management team to support the identified customer service skills and attitudes, throughout all levels of the organization.
- Institute an ongoing process, i.e. the interventions must have staying power.
- Design training materials and activities to support branded skills and attitudes on a continuing basis.

BACKGROUND

The President and CEO contacted TMI US after experiencing the successful implementation of two customized projects, in partnership with TMI, when he was CEO of two companies in South Africa and the Bahamas.

IDENTIFIED ISSUES

- To merge the cultures of newly purchased properties with those of existing properties, and create a distinctive culture unique to their brand.
- Of the twelve factors listed in the internal audit conducted by the consultants, the five listed as causing the most concern were:
 - internal staff relations
 - communication
 - recognition
 - managerial style
 - empowerment

INTERVENTIONS

- Two project team members conducted site visits at each property, identifying logistics, key players, and key needs.
- Company wide anonymous culture audit completed by 25% of staff establishing a baseline.
- Staff members selected as Brand Champions at each property; action steps were identified and roles assigned for this team to act as logistics directors and hosts for the all-staff intervention.
- Management briefing for 60 corporate and senior level managers, to gain corporate buy in for the brand implementation program which was adopted as one of the five annual goals for the corporation.
- One-day management briefing for managers and supervisors, held at each location to share culture audit findings and to gain buy in for the all staff program.



Complex organizations in the service industry are no doubt going to have a variety of education levels; all materials must be vetted with this diversity in mind.

- Design and delivery of a two-day branded customer service engagement program for all staff. The program was delivered in three months time to over 12,000 staff, covering multiple states in the US, and all day, swing, and graveyard shifts.
- The brand promise was built around an existing acronym that the casino used; it became a part of the daily language of the casino.
- Three casino internal facilitators were selected and trained by TMI US to deliver the two-day all staff event.
- One year after the two-day, all staff brand engagement program was held, eight half-day Managing in a Branded Service Environment workshops were held, to support managers and supervisors to continually deliver the branded customer service behaviors and attitudes.
- Two casino internal facilitators trained to deliver the Managing in a Branded Service Environment workshops.
- One year following the initial all staff event, a half-day event was designed and implemented. This was highly customized, and focused on empowerment issues and the new guest satisfaction program implemented by the casino.
- Three casino internal facilitators were trained to deliver the half-day program which is still used as part of the organization's induction program for all new employees.
- Internal facilitators are still delivering all three programs.
- The consultants were surprised by the unusually high positive ratings for the majority of the audit factors, until we learned that, at most properties, managers "supervised" the audits. The casino operates in a highly competitive internal environment, and apparently no casino wanted to report anything but stellar results.
- Despite assurances from the corporate office that the individual properties were empowered to make independent decisions concerning their training and consulting requirements, this was not always the case.
- As the organization operates 24/7, the all staff intervention program covered all three shifts—day, swing, and grave. Energy levels were more difficult to maintain during the swing and night shifts.
- The casino had a huge population; the ability to deliver brand engagement programs to large groups was essential. Without this ability, such a program would be too expensive for most organizations to purchase.
- The brand communication effort needed to be delivered in a concentrated three-month period.
- Several properties were located in the most impoverished areas of the US, having a history of high unemployment, high welfare, and minimal education – some areas had literacy levels of 46%. The lack of literacy required careful presentation of the brand elements.
- Many of the staff were Spanish speaking employees; TMI US was able to offer programs taught in Spanish, with Spanish language materials. The impact on the Spanish speaking population was profound; they felt appreciated, included, and most importantly, they learned the same content as the English speaking population. This was particularly important as the Spanish speaking population tended to concentrate in certain departments which were critical to delivering the branded service.

CHALLENGES

- The two major challenges the client faced were:
 1. high staff turnover (very common to the hospitality industry), and
 2. ensuring their management style was in harmony with their brand elements.



OUTCOMES

- The HR department continues to gather metrics across a wide range of the organization's activities on a regular basis, including the efficacy of its training programs.
- A mentoring program has been established for new hires.
- Record first quarter results announced in 2004.
- Casino won several awards for its internal operations.
- The casino is regularly referenced by customer service experts.
- Staff turnover rates reduced from 60 percent to 34 percent—the lowest in the industry.

LESSONS LEARNED

Ensure that any audits conducted remain truly anonymous, so that accurate metrics and baselines can be established. This requires selling the purpose of the audits as a benchmarking tool.

This client provided TMI US, the consulting organization, with very sophisticated, highly energized staff to work on this project. Identifying this type of internal support is a huge contributor to the success of this intervention.

Involving the consultant's experienced trainers to deliver the initial brand engagement program was a strong success factor for this project. TMI US consultants/trainers were able to work as respected outsiders, and deliver highly engaging, highly entertaining, two-day programs that generally ended in standing ovations for the trainer. An internal trainer would simply not have been able to energize a group of this type without years of practice. Clients need to decide where to spend their money; and saving money on brand engagement programs is not the best area to save cost.

Part of a consulting project involves helping the client gain recognition for the work they have undertaken.

Complex organizations in the service industry are no doubt going to have a variety of education levels; all materials must be vetted with this diversity in mind.

Establishing personal relationships so you are treated as if you are part of the staff, with the same degree of confidence, is critical for a program that is so highly integrated into a corporation's daily life.

Building in ongoing activities are critical for the success of a program of this type. This casino has now shifted into its second generation of leaders. The program is still being supported in a major way; in fact, it defines this casino's brand of service. Training the casino's internal facilitators has been a critical success factor of this total project.