

HOTEL MATYSAK, BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA

Employee Empowerment, Family Friendly Policies and Work-Life Balance

Introduction

This case study examines HR practices in a family owned company which is expanding its' services from rural areas to urban locations. This case study explores employee motivation, empowerment and sustaining a positive family friendly work-life balance. Getting employees to take on responsibility, inspiring creativity and fostering employee motivation is critical for a hospitality facility focused on exceptional customer service quality targeting higher profit margins. Creating a friendly working environment contributes to overall performance, customer service quality and employee retention.

History

Matysak was founded in 1989 and is a true family firm where every member of the family owns a share in the company. The primary business is wine production with 50,000 litres bottled in 1989 rising to 1.5 million litres in 2008. Besides wine production, the company has 8 specialised wine shops; the Vinum Galeria Bozen restaurant in Pezinok and Hotel Matysak in Bratislava. The company currently employs about 130 employees. Its headquarters are located in the south-west of Slovakia in a well known Pezinok wine production area.

Peter Matysak, head of the company, embodies the organisational values of hard, honest work, exceptional service and production quality. This approach to work by the company founder and CEO influences the whole work culture and company life of Vino Matysak Ltd. Matysak wine is known as belonging to the one of the most distinguished wine vintages in Slovakia and has received many national and international awards.

The hospitality sector became the next step for Vino Matysak Ltd. business activities. Both the hotel and the restaurant support the organisation's wine production activities where the only wine on the menu comes from the Matysak vintage. The company also produces mineral water from a stream in Pezinok and offers traditional meat products from Slovak and Pezinok. All these products are only available in Hotel Matysak and at the Vinum Galeria Bozen Pezinok restaurant.

The Hotel Matysak opened in Bratislava in 2005. The hotel has 32 rooms and 3 apartments. The restaurant has capacity for 75 diners. A small wine shop selling Matysak products is also located in the hotel. Besides the usual staff employed in the hotel and restaurant, three butchers are engaged to produce traditional high quality meat products for the restaurant. These traditional meat products comprise a variety of sausages and hams and are also available for sale in the wine shop belonging to the hotel.

Peter Matysak's original concept was not to construct and run a hotel. The company simply needed retail space to sell their wine. However, after much deliberation, a hotel

was built in the centre of Bratislava, and much wine is housed in the old wine cellars of the hotel. Restaurant guests can even glimpse the stylish old wine cellars from the restaurant through glass floors. This cellar serves as the wine cellar for the whole Matysak company.

The hotel restaurant emphasises high quality food and services. Wine is carefully selected and tested every year and the restaurant employees are trained to understand wine varieties. All meat products are carefully selected and transported from favoured suppliers to meet the needs of Hotel Matysak and Vinum Galeria Bozen restaurant.

HR Management Practices at Hotel Matysak

Tradition and family values are the bedrock for marketing, HR and management strategies and practices at hotel Matysak. The hotel does not have any specific procedures for the recruitment and selection of employees. As the hotel is only 3 years old, the hotel has yet to settle on established systems for recruitment, selection and staff induction. The recruitment of staff starts with the advertisement of available positions. Management publicise new positions and opportunities through the media, specialised web portals and personal contacts. Employee's social networks are also a welcome recruitment source. Recruitment agencies are not used as the management do not view this as an effective use of resources.

Recruitment interviews with job applicants are organised in two stages. A preliminary screening interview with a job applicant is performed by the relevant front-line manager. Suitable applicants then undergo an employment interview performed together with the hotel managing director and the front-line manager. Successful applicants at Hotel Matysak typically hold appropriate professional qualifications and have worked for a period of time in other recognised hospitality establishments. Graduates or individuals with limited professional experience are generally not accepted for employment at the hotel.

In practice staff in the hotel are divided into two groups: operational employees and managers. Salaries for operational employees are calculated monthly on the basis of their department's financial performance. Management provide clear and open information about the way these salaries are calculated to operational employees. This is important for maintaining employee confidence. Generally about 50% of operational employee income comes from a basic fixed salary and 50% is contribution related to the performance of the relevant department.

The managers receive a fixed salary amount each month. At the end of the financial year, managers may receive bonuses depending on the performance of the hotel. There is no specified calculation for these incentives. These bonuses are the prerogative of the CEO and depend on the performance of the hotel as well as the performance of the whole company. Butchers are paid in the same way as managers. Their job in the hotel is considered both creative and independent. They are also considered to be very competent gastronomy professionals.

Management naturally pays significant attention to providing wine training for staff. A company sommelier visits the hotel restaurant weekly to ascertain any potential difficulties with the quality of the wine on the menu. They also examine how wine is served and whether the restaurant staff understand the selection of wine on offer. If necessary a short training session is provided for restaurant staff.

Both management and restaurant staff attend the company's annual wine selection and tasting workshop. This is organised after the new wine from the previous season becomes available. Here the company's wine experts, managers and selected staff from the company's restaurants taste the available wine production and discuss which new products are suitable for the restaurants' menu. These annual meetings are held in the company wine cellar at Hotel Matysak.

Employee Empowerment and Family Friendly Work-Life

High levels of performance are a key ingredient of HR strategy at the hotel. Employees should feel that they are a part of the company. The hotel pays above average salary levels and employees can also benefit from obtaining loans with zero interest rates from the company. The CEO and founder of the company visits the hotel almost every morning to meet with management and restaurant staff informally and discuss operational issues. These informal meetings assist with the improvement of the managerial activities at the hotel and strengthen personal relationships between the individual employees and the head of the company.

Besides everyday personal contact with the CEO, specific events are organised weekly for staff and management. Employees meet every week to play football. This supports friendliness, teamwork and family spirit and improves communication between the managers of the company.

A creative attitude to work is intentionally encouraged by the hotel management and is a part of the company philosophy. The creativity is closely related to employee empowerment. Naturally some job positions are more suitable for employee empowerment. Managerial positions, butchers and chefs are considered to be the most independent and empowered positions in the hotel. For instance, butchers in the hotel have the freedom to change recipes or introduce/produce new products. An empowered approach is also thought to have contributed to the hotel chef obtaining a national "Chef of the year" award.

Overall, a strong focus on quality is clearly visible in the whole company culture. The company working environment is friendly and characterised by high levels of trust and responsibility. Employees enjoy a high quality of work-life and family values are emphasised throughout the organisation. Consequently, the hotel enjoys a high level of success and offers a consistently high level of service quality.

