

THE R WORD

some useful staffing strategies to ease the economic woes of the purring Celtic kitten

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Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics

Having flicked through the commentary in any newspaper of late, there is little to be smiling about. Like the proverbial needle in a giant haystack, good news is harder to come by. If it is not escalating global food prices, hikes in the cost of transportation or the spiralling unemployment rate, it is a depressing statistic speculating the demise of a hospitality provider.

It would be very easy to add fuel to the fire by re-packaging these statistics but to what end? With terms such as 'credit crunch', 'recession' or 'global downturn' abounding, we've all got the message - we're in for a turbulent economic ride. While the dark clouds and scattered predications loom we have to recognise which human resource actions are necessary so that drastic measures are avoided while necessary adjustments are meticulously planned and implemented.

Recognise the 'P' factor

The tourism and hospitality industry relies heavily on the quality of its staff for its growth and survival. Unlike many other industries, ours is essentially based on people-to-people encounters and this calls for the implementation of a unique blend of human resource management practices. With this in mind, it is absolutely imperative that you don't reach for your staff-cutting hatchet when embarking on a cost-cutting mission. There is no doubt that many hospitality providers will embark on cost-cutting measures like recruitment and pay freezes, reduced outsourcing of staffing solutions (which may incur recruitment agency fees). However, downscaling and cost-cutting approaches should not be calculated solely on the basis of your bottom line. Don't make the mistake of shedding staff and associated labour costs in the first instance. This may not be your ideal solution.

Reflect. Assure. Communicate.

Now is the time to examine your workforce. Assure team members that the economic hardship will pass, that management is committed to seeing things through, and that this phase can be pain free only with team effort. Also, you must communicate cutbacks. Justify your actions by communicating your rationale. It cultivates a higher-trust working relationship.

Invest. Don't skimp.

When you feel rundown, you take vitamins and supplements and catch-up on the things that have been neglected. Staffing is much the same. Now is the time to nourish and develop your workforce by providing training and up-skilling that was put on the back burner in the past.

Exploit expansion opportunities

If the protuberances in your coffers are causing some form of discomfort, take advantage of fellow hospitality establishments suffering a similar fate in today's shrinking economy. It maybe a good time to look at qualified staff from other organisations who may not have been available to you in the past.

Value your team

Remember the good times? Just think back to when the neon 'NO VACANCIES' sign was constantly illuminated and granting a pay rise request was as easy as dining out every weekend. Throughout those booming years some of your staff will have displayed immense dedication and commitment to your organisation. Appreciate that they have been essential in shaping your brand. You have expended resources to train and nurture them and you have grown with them. It is now time to foster that relationship, so think before you make any decisions that will affect your team players, their morale and their commitment.

A happy ending

Yes, liquidations and examinerships have increased, profits have fallen and room revenues are down. Yes, unemployment is at its highest in nine years. We all recognise the need to re-examine our expenditure. But this hiccup in our economy will cyclically turn and bring us to pastures greener. When exactly that will happen is as easy to predict as the next sunny day. In the meantime take time now to remember the three R's. Reflect on the past. Revive your human resources. Replenish your business. Aren't you lucky you're not in the construction industry!

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