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Roundtable



Learning to be nice

Travel Gazette India discusses how attitude training is one of the most important components of service delivery

TGI: What kind of training programme do you have for your employees/associates?

D'Souza: We have a structured training programme for our people. Alertness and attention to detail are the areas to focus on with poise, posture and terminology. Our training programme has various sub topics – grooming and appearance, problem solving, listening skills, and telephone skills.

For 30 days newcomers are exposed to all activities at the department and hotel. At the end of the programme a test is conducted to ensure that the person has absorbed everything and is ready to go on the shop floor.

Then comes remedial training, subsequent to going on the shop floor. This is based on guest satisfaction tracking system – in case his name appears on any satisfaction cards – or if he is named in any untoward instances. We address specifically the issue where he has gone wrong. Everyone goes through remedial training between one and three months of joining.

We have refresher training for staff members who have been with us for long.

Our training need analysis is developed on the basis of guest comments, survey cards and heads of departments (HoD). A calendar is developed based on these.

Training is of two types – behavioural and technical. The HoD will be the best for technical training. Besides the HoD, there are three certified department trainers certified by an external agency.

Kulkarni: We have a very structured training and development programme. When someone new joins our organisation they undergo an individual development plan (IDP). This gets captured through the goal setting exercise. IDP is based on the future growth and opportunities of the company and personal aspirations of that individual. We add these points in a structured format and come out with the training needs

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required for that individual. Induction and orientation programmes are also in place. Through this we ensure employees who join us from different backgrounds are able to understand the company and its work environment in an effective manner.

Martyris: At Kuoni we follow a Building Block Approach to training. This allows for our staff performing roles of differing complexity to be trained as per their needs. For our customer-facing staff and their supervisors we have training on customer service, grooming and etiquette, and team building.

Staff showing potential to handle roles of higher complexity attend Potential Development Centres and are observed according to the Kuoni competency model. A developmental plan is charted for them with their inputs as well. Trainings across the board include attitude and interpersonal skills and the Kuoni Code of Conduct. Our staff performing managerial roles is sent for the annually held Kuoni Management Development Programs (MDPs). These are in-house customised and truncated Travel MBAs. The advanced version of the MDP is called the Business Leadership Development Program (BLDP) and is a simulation based program for employees to hone their strategy and forecast skills. The senior most attend Corporate Development Centres at Kuoni Headquarters in Zurich.

TGI: Do you pay special attention to their personality and skills when assigning departments to trainees? An example?

D'Souza: We hire people for their attitude, skills can be developed. That is the reason why we do a reference check for attitude. Except in the kitchen, we don't give a trade test. Depending on the interest, we assign a department. We have a series of interviews with the HoD, HR manager and the GM – no person will be hired without the GM having seen him/her. If we do find that someone is more suited for a job other than their preference, we try to encourage them to join that department. That is rare, but it happens.

Kulkarni: It's very crucial to pay special attention to the personality and skills when assigning departments to trainees. Every individual has his own strengths and we focus on working on those strengths. As a company we believe that individual strengths are more important rather than focusing on the development needs.

We capture these individual strengths and aspirations and assign a role and responsibility based on that. We believe in a strength-based philosophy, which believes in sharpening the strong points.

For example, an individual who aspired to be a sales expert joined us in a different function. We put people in a job profile where they are productively engaged and prosper. We always believe in giving an opportunity to individuals to explore various possibilities and make sure that they get placed in the kind of role they like rather than in a role they are not inclined to or don't have the required skills for.

Martyris: Yes, all trainees go through psychometric assessment tests and their skills are carefully monitored and assessed throughout the training programme. Only then are they assigned departments.

TGI: How often do you train staff?

D'Souza: Our regular training is at least two hours on a weekly basis. Other kinds of trainings are scheduled according to the calendar and take place at all the units.

Kulkarni: At the beginning of the year we decide the training man-days per employee. In our appraisal system we have the priorities and the criticalness of the training programme. We have divided it into 5 4 3 2 1. Five defines the training needed immediately and One signifies the least level. We always focus on these priorities and this makes the training required exactly quantifiable in nature. We also have an online performance appraisal system so we identify the training needs according to this system. It's an exhaustive training programme which we prepare at the beginning of every quarter. Thus each quarter we have well defined training programmes such as target training programmes, open training programmes, advisor programmes, job enhancement



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and skill checking programmes and others. So we include all these programmes based on the urgency and priority and deliver these programmes.

Martyris: Corporate Training Programs such as the MDP and BLDP, specialist training programmes (for example, finance for non finance etc.) take place annually.

TGI: Do you have a policy of negative and positive reinforcement for the employee?

D'Souza: Yes, we have several initiatives.

“These are in-house customised and truncated Travel MBAs. The Business Leadership Development Program is a simulation based program for employees to hone their strategy and forecast skills”

Bernard Martyris

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Kulkarni: We don't have a written policies for the positive or negative traits of the individual employees. But we always encourage people to give an open, honest and continuous feedback so that people participate in it. It's our company philosophy to talk about people's strengths. We are also launching a programme called team blend where we aim to sensitise people on individual strengths. We are using online Thomas profiling where we try to educate employees on learning to focus on the individual strengths of people rather than on the weaknesses.

Martyris: If this means reward systems, yes we have reward and recognition programmes at the regional, divisional and corporate level as well. Since we have a very specific goal setting process and a half yearly performance appraisal cycle, any negative reinforcement is done at that time.

TGI: Could you give us examples of positive reinforcement?

D'Souza: Since April this year, we have a 'welcome to work' programme. This is done once a month as a surprise in the morning, for the first shift at 7am, when employees walk in to see all HoDs and the GM waiting to welcome them at work. There is place set out for tea, coffee, juices, breakfast rolls. There is a notice board for comments.

Another programme is 'dine with the GM' which is held every month. Under this programme, at each unit, 10 staff members are selected to dine with the GM at any of the speciality restaurants. The GMs are expected to get feedback from the team, especially with regard to any grievances or suggestions. Suggestions are implemented within a given time period. We have an employee of the month programme.

We have hampers for weddings and childbirths. And after one year of ser-

“ It's our philosophy to talk about people's strengths. We use online Thomas profiling where we educate employees on learning to focus on the strengths rather than weaknesses”

Rahul Kulkarni

vice, for all our employees we have a programme where they can stay in any of the group properties for a few days. All food and stay are complimentary and any paid services are charged at 50%. We also have a home loan interest subsidy at 10%.

Kulkarni: As mentioned in the answer before, for positive implementation we have a programme called Team Blend, where we focus on what comes naturally to a person and is a strength rather than development needed areas. We also assign tasks based on the strong areas rather than on the weak areas.

Martyris: The Annual Kuoni India Awards Program branded the Kuoni Fellowship Awards (KFA) was started in 2006 and has recognised excellence across the company in various categories over the last four years. These awards recognise excellence individually, and as a team. Staff are recognised and felicitated via awards ranging from Customer Service Excellence demonstrated by front liners to Functional Excellence Awards both of which are voted for by the employees themselves. Managerial Awards for managerial excellence across various role complexities; Learning Excellence Awards based on learning and successfully demonstrating newly acquired skills during the MDPs. The Value Added Services Excellence Award is won by the Kuoniite bringing

in considerable earnings via a service that serves to enhance our core business. Entrepreneurial Excellence awards the employee demonstrating entrepreneurship within his/her role in Kuoni. The Divisional Excellence Award is won by the division showing the highest score as well as a considerable delta increase over it's previous year's scores on people as well as finance parameters.

Apart from the Kuoni Fellowship Awards, staff within Kuoni is incentivised via FAM Tours or monetarily.

TGI: What is the human interface USP of your group?

D'Souza: We have a 'welcome back' programme for rehiring a former staff member. If one of our staff members leaves and goes, the 'welcome back' programme allows him to come back within 15 months, provided he fulfils certain criteria. We'll check the exit interview form, details of tenure and if all is fine, the person can be rehired with the previous duration of service added to current service so he eligible for all benefits such as gratuity. It is very popular. We welcome back even those who want to come back after more than 15 months but the bridge initiative will not be applicable to them.

Kulkarni: The philosophies of our company to focus on strengths provide opportunities and the freedom to explore such opportunities in the company itself.

We also believe in supporting such a person aggressively who wishes to pursue an opportunity outside the realm of his/her present work.

Such philosophies, I believe are the USP of our company.

Martyris: Our Employee Value Proposition is that we are a 'Fellowship Of Winners.' This is the overarching theme of all recruitment and employee engagement activities.[\[1\]](#)

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Adrian D'Souza