

Staff Training In The Hospitality Industry In Kenya; The Only Competitive Edge In The Current Competitive Environment.

Dennis Kinoti Atugi¹, Joydrine Njeri Njeru²

¹ Directorate of Tourism, County Government of Meru, Kenya

² Teachers Service Commission, Kenya

Corresponding email: Dennis Kinoti Atugi

ABSTRACT: *Training is the process that provides employees with the knowledge and the skills required to operate within the systems and standards set by management.” (Sommerville 2007). In the wake of globalization, every sector in the economy is now facing new challenges, the greatest of which being competition emanating from various Countries across the globe. The hospitality industry which covers a wide range of organizations offering food & beverage, Entertainment and accommodation is one of the industries which have been strongly affected by globalization. Of the five key resources in a business (Money, Materials, Minutes, Manpower and Methodology), skilled manpower is the most important as it directly affects the efficient utilization of the other four. Hospitality industry is one of the fastest growing sectors in Kenya. Its impact to economic development cannot be underestimated. As evidenced in Kenya, international hotel chains are venturing the market to maximize market opportunities available as well after devolution several investors have put up facilities in every corner of the Country to cater for the growing domestic demand. The highly competitive environment in which these facilities operate requires a highly skillful workforce in order to remain a successful player in the competitive game of the industry. One of the main problems which occur in the workplace is the lack of training to continuously equip staff with the requisite skills, hence this paper intends to accentuate the importance of staff training in the volatile hospitality industry.*

KEYWORDS: *Hospitality industry, staff training, competitive edge*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Staff training enhances the capabilities of employees and strengthens their competitive advantage. Effective training will improve the personal characters and professional abilities. Not only employees, management and organization would benefit from staff training, customers and guests benefit as well, because of the received quality products and services. (Sommerville 2007.)

Quality and customer satisfaction are particularly important in the hospitality industry. This is because the hospitality industry is very particular to word-of-mouth communications. A non-satisfied consumer tells his/her negative experience to 9 to 20 persons, and this will obviously influence the hotel’s image and subsequent efforts to attract new customers. Even though there are other factors to Customer Satisfaction, namely, price, location, and personality of the buyer, Service Quality receives special attention from the service marketers because it is within the control of the service provider. Thus, delivering quality service is not an option to driving customer satisfaction. Globally, customers in the hospitality industry are increasingly becoming more sophisticated and demanding and the quality of service has become vital, thus the hospitality industry should pursue a more rigorous approach to fighting competition by paying a closer attention to service quality as it has a huge influence on customer satisfaction.

The level of service quality depends on the qualities of employees. The qualities are about knowledge, skills and thoughts which lead to a hotel’s survival and development. Therefore, staff training is essential in many ways; it increases productivity while employees are armed with professional knowledge, experienced skills and valid thoughts; staff training also motivates and inspires workers by providing employees all needed information in work as well as help them to recognize how important their jobs are. With the development of the technologies and the whole business environment, employees are requested to be more skilled and qualified, even if you are a good employee today, you could be obsolete some other day if you do not keep studying. A company needs organized staff training if it wants to remain competitive among others. (Yafang Wang 2008.) Training and development are integral to a Hotel’s growth and success. Hotels can however under-train their employees by being unwilling to take the time to explain new staff tasks that need to be performed.

When this unwillingness occurs, Ryan (2008) states that three scenarios may take place – the employee will not be able to help a client the way they should, the client will be left unsatisfied by the hotel’s service

level, and lastly the employee will become frustrated by the company and his or her service level will drop to a minimum. Studies have shown that training programs increase employee satisfaction, employee morale and employee retention, and decreases turnover and hiring rates. Training has been shown to improve knowledge and in turn knowledge improves the delivery of hospitality business related activities.

Daniels (2008) mentions in her article that in the current economic situation; companies may be tempted to cut their training budgets, but they should not however abandon training. Hotels should instead use this situation as an opportunity because training boosts morale and commitment by showing employees they are a valued and important resource. The training itself provides skills and enthusiasm to help participants provide amazing customer service. Great customer experiences lead to brand loyalty.

Rapid development of hotel industry and competition has led to the need for personnel training. The level of quality of service is dependent of the qualities of employees. Employee qualities are linked to knowledge, skills, competences, experience etc. which lead to the development of hotels. Therefore, employee training is of vital importance since employee performance and productivity increases as well. They possess professional knowledge, experience and valuable skills that can be used to perform more effectively. Training is important in the motivation and inspiration of workers by securing needed information for the job, and it helps them get to know the important affairs.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Armstrong (1998), one of the features of working life today is that whatever training is obtained at the start will almost certainly become redundant or obsolete during the same working life. The need to train, acquire a new knowledge and new skills has become an everyday aspect of each individual's working life. Armstrong further states that, in some cases this may merely be an updating process, but in others, it will require a complete change. Employee training and development are at the heart of employee utilization, productivity, commitment, motivation and growth.

Many employees have failed in organizations because their need for training was not identified and provided for as an indispensable part of management function.

Currently various hotel chains have established base in Kenya to tap on its great potential, hospitality facilities with top class infrastructure and facilities offering very economical prices are mushrooming in every corner of our Country. This implies then in the seven P's of marketing (Place, product, promotion, price, process, physical evidence and people), the hospitality facilities that will place emphasis on empowering its manpower will have a competitive edge. Many investors place less importance to staff training terming it as unnecessary cost, as well they recruit staff who are not highly skilled as they are less costly, this paper therefore is intended to be an eye opener to hospitality investors who continue pumping money to upgrading their infrastructure and extensive marketing programmes while neglecting continuous improvement of skills for their staff.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Training is concerned with imparting specific skills for a particular purpose. Training is the sequence of learning a sequence of programmed behavior. Training is the act of increasing the skills of an employee for doing a particular job. "Training is the process that provides employees with the knowledge and the skills required to operate within the systems and standards set by management." (Sommerville 2007). Sommerville further states that staff training enhances the capabilities of employees and strengthens their competitive advantage. Effective training will improve the personal characters and professional abilities and not only benefit employees, management and organization but also customers and guests, who receive quality products and services.

The standards of hospitality facilities and services offered have evolved over the last decade towards the extensive use of technology, environment friendly services, pricing, market segmentation, regional preferences, etc. The Kenyan hotel industry has seen a significant growth in room inventory across categories from upscale luxury to limited services and, boutique and budget hotels. The occupancy and the room rates have seen continued gains both from the domestic and the international traveler in both the business and leisure segment.

Staff training is an essential management tool, it has many benefits, such as shortens the study time, increases work effectiveness, helps employees and the company itself to compete in the fast-changing environment, reduces damages and wastage. Staff training is a way of motivating employees, upgrading their skills, expanding their knowledge, preparing employees for self-development. In any kind of business, human resources are the most powerful sources. How to attract outstanding personnel, how to make full use of employees' abilities and potentials in order to help achieve the organizational objectives are the questions that every leader should take into consideration. Staff training is a very essential part of Human Resource Management, it is a path for the management to know about their employees, it is a way to help employees to

make best use of their own abilities, and it is a method to assist employees to become more professional at what they do. (Yang Xiao 2010).

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study used analytical descriptive approach to handle the current study through analyzing previous studies which studied the importance of staff training in the hospitality industry.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Riley (1996), about 64 percent of jobs in tourism and hospitality industry are either semiskilled or unskilled. This comprises of about 6 percent in managerial, 8 percent in supervisory while 22 percent with craft are skilled, Riley also notes that, the low skills profile of jobs results to low status, low pay and poor working conditions in tourism and hospitality industry. Contrary to this, managers in the hospitality industry value practical and operational skills as well as on-job training, which may be acquired easily within the workplace, formal qualification from new entrants is not highly regarded within the hospitality industry. (ILO, 2001).

A large proportion of tourism and hospitality employees are workers with other formal educational backgrounds; other than tourism and hospitality, or students who work on part time basis as well as contingent workers (Hjalager and Anderson, 2001). According to Jim Hartigan, Senior Vice President for Customer Quality and Performance for Hilton Hotels Corporation (2003), an architecturally perfect hotel building does not form part of fond memories to a guest as it does the direct experience he/she had involving a hotel employee. Hartigan further observes that certain hotel equipment and other facilities can be copied by the competitor, but the genuine personal service cannot be replicated. Kung'u. S. (2011), found out that poor employee training programmes was one of the key causes of employee turnover in three to five star rated hotels in Nairobi. Opportunities for training and development/career development contributes greatly towards employee job satisfaction in the hospitality industry in Kenya, (Mariam, K, 2017).

Previous studies have shown that improvements in hotel performance can be achieved through empowering staff by continuously developing their capacities to sustain effectiveness. They have proved that training is the most important factor in the business world today because training increases the efficiency and the effectiveness of both the employee and the organization which result to immediate and long term returns.

VI. CONCLUSION

The summary of findings collected from secondary data indicates that employees in the hospitality industry highly value training, customers as well value staff who are professional in their field as much as they value quality infrastructure and facilities however it is sad to note that many hospitality facilities do not place much importance on staff training as they do on the hardware of their facilities. Kenya Tourism and hospitality industry is facing stiff competition from our neighbors in regard to our main product (beaches and wildlife) hence Investors, hotel managers and Government regulatory bodies should ensure continuous staff training and improvement to sharpen their skills as this will ultimately drive customer satisfaction resulting to customer loyalty which will hence create a competitive edge.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above results it is clear that staff training in the hospitality industry has not gained momentum despite its importance to customer satisfaction, in this regard the author of this paper gives the following recommendations: To signify the importance of staff competence the government should make it a policy requirement that for any hospitality and tourism facility to be licensed to open and operate, it should recruit, and retain professionals, qualified for the tasks they are employed for. As a measure to ensure continuous staff training the Government should introduce minimum annual training hours for all staff employed in all tourism and hospitality facilities, these should form part of the determinants for renewal of operating licenses. This can be achieved though, short courses in learning institution, lectures and practical sessions at work place, multitasking, multitasking and cross exposure programmes.

Hospitality/tourism training institutions should be freshly and regularly vetted on the quality of graduates they produce, to enhance the quality of training offered by these institutions, they should be required to have a facility of a certain rating for practical sessions of their students during their academic period, as well minimum practical training hours (say 50% of the theory hours) should be set for students as a requirement before being released to the market.

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