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Selection Of Students For Hotel Schools: A Comparative Study

Abstract

In the discussion - Selection Of Students For Hotel Schools: A Comparative Study - by William Morgan, Professor, School of Hospitality Management at Florida International University, Morgan's initial observation is: "Standards for the selection of students into schools of hospitality management around the world vary considerably when it comes to measuring attitudes toward the industry. The author discusses current standards and recommends some changes."

In addition to intellectual ability, Professor Morgan wants you to know that an intangible element such as attitude is an equally important consideration to students seeking curriculum and careers in the hospitality field. "...breaches in behavior or problems in the tourist employee encounter are often caused by attitudinal conditions which pre exist the training and which were not able to be totally corrected by the unfreezing, movement, and refreezing processes required in attitudinal change," says Morgan.

"...other than for some requirements for level or grade completed or marks obtained, 26 of the 54 countries sampled (48.1 percent) had no pre-selection process at all. Of those having some form of a selection process (in addition to grades), 14 schools in 12 countries (22.2 percent) had a formal admissions examination," Professor Morgan empirically provides. "It was impossible, however, to determine the scope of this admissions examination as it might relate to attitude." The attitude intangible is a difficult one to quantify.

With an apparent sameness in hotels, restaurants, and their facilities the significant distinctions are to be found in their employees. This makes the selection process for both schools and employers a high priority.

Moreover, can a student, or a prospective employee, overcome stereotypes and prejudices to provide a high degree of service in the hospitality industry? This query is an important element of this article.

"If utilized in the hotel, technical, or trade school or in the hiring process at the individual facility, this [hiring] process would provide an opportunity to determine if the prospective student or worker is receptive to the training to be received," advises Professor Morgan. "Such a student or worker is realistic in his aims and aspirations, ready in his ability to receive training, and responsive to the needs of the guest, often someone very different from himself in language, dress, or degree of creature comforts desired," your author further counsels.

Professor Morgan looks to transactional analysis, role playing, languages, and cross cultural education as playing significant roles in producing well intentioned and knowledgeable employees. He expands upon these concepts in the article.

Professor Morgan holds The International Center of Glion, Switzerland in high regard and cites that program's efforts to maintain relationships and provide graduates with ongoing attitudinal enlightenment programs.

Keywords

William Morgan, Selection Of Students For Hotel Schools: A Comparative Study, Stereotypes, Racism, Selection, Attitude, FIU

Selection Of Students For Hotel Schools: A Comparative Study

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Standards for the selection of students into schools of hospitality management around the world vary considerably when it comes to measuring attitudes toward the industry. The author discusses current standards and recommends some changes.

Despite ancient writings which suggest that people will remain in one area if the environment remains supportive, and only leave in the face of dwindling resources or hostile neighbors,¹ the evidence suggests that peoples of all countries, all cultures, and all political persuasions travel if given the chance.²

Peoples of many races, religions, and cultures, utilizing many different languages and operating under diverse mores, seek, in their own ways, to satisfy internal needs which they believe can be satiated by travel. Be it for rest and recreation, to visit families or friends, to experience different environments, or to seek additional knowledge, each traveler, within the framework of his or her unique background and motivational valences of the moment, attempts to utilize the touristic experience as a psychological balm which will quiet an unsatisfied yearning.

At the beginning, most people travel to destinations which are within their own countries, or to neighboring areas where they may be protected within a carefully controlled atmosphere of similar languages, customs, and foods.³ Only after they feel comfortable in these travel experiences, do some venture into more foreign environments.

Despite the distance, the location, or the circumstances, all who travel away from their place of origin are always subject to somebody else, albeit in varying degrees depending upon conditions.⁴

People may eat at a different time; they may utilize a different language; they may practice a different form of sanitation; or they may be ethnocentric or self centered in their approach to life.⁵ Depending upon the degree of differences which exist between the traveler and the host destination, the tourist (and in a lesser sense the host or hostess) experiences a phenomenon known as cultural shock.

Experiencing differing values, means of expression, rates of crime, etc., the tourist may go through stages of excitement, disillusionment, and possible adaptation as he or she attempts to adjust to the new and

different atmosphere. In most of these situations, the hotelier, often representing⁶ a hotel chain of the traveler's home country, tends to serve as a bridge between the two cultures, and helps to cushion the shock or to mute the differences which exist.⁷

This is the *raison d'être* of the industry which exists because travelers and tourists exist and survives only if it is able to make these people feel welcome, satisfied, comfortable, and safe. The industry exists to meet their needs.

Although differences exist in peoples, and differing cultures dictate unique behaviors and standards, most travelers are guided by the hedonistic goal to enjoy themselves while meeting the specific needs which they bring with them on their travels. As Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, has so aptly stated, "There is a great industry in other people's pleasures."⁸

To be sure, most adults have needs which are personal some of which are crude, selfish, and primitive.⁹ We are, therefore, confronted by an attempt to satisfy a plethora of specific objectives to satisfy these many diverse wants. But in the main, despite the geographical, psychological, and ethnic difference which exist, most needs of people may be categorized according to the hierarchy of needs proposed by Abraham Maslow.¹⁰ Be they related to the physiological, safety, social, ego, or self-actualization objectives, most needs with which we as hotel operators are confronted fall into one of these categories. People are attracted to destinations in which they feel welcome, safe, and important, and they are repelled from specific locations or hotels when they feel threatened by conditions of safety, or believe that they are not welcome.¹¹

Fortunately for those of us catering to the typical international tourist, we find some commonality in these needs. Although differences do, of course, exist between peoples, generally tourists from industrialized countries are usually well educated, exposed to similar conditions of hygiene, social stands, and the like. In fact, save for distinctive physical features, it is often difficult—before we hear one speak or see one eat or drink—to determine if a particular business or social traveler is German, Dutch, Swiss, English, or American.

As a result of this apparent homogeneity, most hotels, modeled on the Western style, have a sameness of standards, facilities, and offerings which meet these cosmopolitan needs. Only the staff, and possibly the decor, and some unique food or beverage offerings are the real differences which exist.

But to be sure, as Peters and Waterman have reported in their *In Search of Excellence*, specific differences do exist between companies.¹² In the hotel business, in the business of catering to the specific needs of the guest, the biggest differences which may be found are in the personnel which staff the facilities, be they restaurants, hotels, travel agencies, or tour buses.

Unless we operate a very small entrepreneurial facility, where we are present on site during all operating hours, and are able to practice the traditional "Ye Host" philosophy, we are obliged to cater to our guests and to meet their needs through employees in all facets of our operations.

Employees Hold Key To Guest Satisfaction

Just as the guests have needs, the employees from the managerial staff to the lowest ranking operating level in the organization also bring with them to the workplace their own needs, wants, and pre-conceptions, the latter of which are best referred to as attitudes.

These attitudes, mental states which cause one to act toward or against certain people or things, are usually accumulations of feelings, beliefs, and experiences which become innate in our personalities and which cause us to behave in certain ways. They may be positive or negative (in the view of the hotel) so that an employee behaves in a way which helps the guest achieve the satisfaction of his or her needs or which prevents this from happening.

The International Labor Organization in its report 2 of the Regional Seminar on Human Resources, Buenos Aires, 1976, (contained in a book published by the ILO in 1979) identified some of these positive attitudes which a hotel worker should have as discretion, amiability, politeness, ease of manner, cheerfulness, and attention. The report further suggested that although, of course, many of these attitudes are innate due to past experiences, that they could be developed or redirected during a selection or training process.¹³

A 1983 survey of hotel operators in the United States, addressing the question of "What Makes a Hotel Great," suggested the concepts of "an informed, friendly, attentive, and well trained staff," in addition to the usual requirements of fine food, good location, high standards of housekeeping, and outstanding interior design.¹⁴

But with marketing playing such an important role in the selection of a particular destination or hotel, we must be able to provide the physical realization to meet the mental and psychological projections. We must provide the "steak to follow the sizzle."¹⁵

In our business the customer is usually not able to touch, hold, or see the "product" he has just purchased and which has been transferred to his ownership, be it a fine dinner just consumed or a restful night spent in a hotel. Rather, during the consumption and use of the services which he buys, there can be no "transfer" without the participation of employees, be they bartenders, waiters, or front office personnel.¹⁶ Attitude, demeanor, and performance are of paramount importance. The worker, therefore, becomes the touchstone of whether guest needs are met and guest dreams realized.

What methods are utilized then to locate, select, educate, and train these all important employees who act as the representatives, agents, and alter egos of the hotel owner, resort operator, or destination marketer? In many countries workers are usually selected from those who are new to the area, or perhaps they are guest workers brought in to perform these functions. However, they represent the hotel, the area, and, even the country to the guest.

Some workers enter the business reluctantly because they are not able to find other types of employment and leave when better opportunities are located. Many, however, particularly at the technical and middle and upper management levels, have entered the field through the

hotel, technical, or professional school route. Are they better qualified to meet the needs of the guest? Are they more sensitive to differences in cultures? Are they better able to empathize with the guest and to behave in ways which will result in a satisfied guest?

Schools In 54 Countries Analyzed

Schools in the hotel, tourism, and catering professions in 54 countries were identified for analysis using directories published by the International Association of Hotel Schools Directors, the Directory of Training Facilities in Hotel and Tourism Occupations published by the ILO, and the CHRIE Directory of Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Schools.¹⁷ This number did not include the United States, which has been treated as a separate entity for comparison purposes. There were 250 different hotel and technical training schools in the hospitality field in these 54 countries, some countries having as many as 24 schools, while others had only 1.

The admissions statements of each were reviewed in order to determine the criteria for selection which were being utilized. Since attitude was considered to be such an important element in the final performance of employees, the normal methods which could be used to measure or infer attitudes were identified, including work experience, aptitude testing, and personal interviews.

The information collected revealed that, other than for some requirements for level or grade completed or marks obtained, 26 of the 54 countries sampled (48.1 percent) had no pre-selection process at all. Of those having some form of a selection process (in addition to grades), 14 schools in 12 countries (22.2 percent) had a formal admissions examination. It was impossible, however, to determine the scope of this admissions examination as it might relate to attitude. Work experience was required of the applying student by 18 schools in 16 countries (29.6 percent) while aptitude tests were required by 15 schools representing 5 countries (9.2 percent); one of the countries which required these tests had 11 of these schools. Interviews were required by 20 schools in 6 countries; one country had 14 of the schools (11 percent).

These results of European, Asian, and African schools were then compared with a subsequent survey done on schools in the United States which had hospitality-related programs. Utilizing the CHRIE directory and Peterson's Annual Guide to Undergraduate Study, 210 programs were identified and a sample of 36 institutions selected to represent all geographical segments of the country, with at least one institution from the CHRIE listing of each state.

Of the 36 institutions sampled only 10 required some sort of pre-selection interviews (27.8 percent); the high school transcript or SAT was the most important. Ten of the 36 (27.8 percent) required some sort of recommendation letter; 6 of these (60 percent) came from the same schools which required the interviews.

The majority of the schools and countries reviewed required some sort of work practice or "stage" as part of or following the training program. These periods, of course, would be able to influence the attitudes

of the students, and the course material being offered could be directed at attitude change and behavior modification.

Of the 54 countries surveyed, 26 (48.1 percent) had no pre-selection process at all besides grades in the attitudinal area; of these, one country had 83 percent of the schools which required aptitude sampling (15), and the same country had 66.6 percent (14 of the 21) schools which required interviews. In the U.S. sample the data were even worse; 22 of the 36 schools (61.1 percent) required no pre-selection process other than the grade or SAT; 4 only required a high school transcript. It is apparent that a very few countries are doing most of the attitudinal screening of potential students for the hospitality area and that when U.S. schools are compared in the aggregate with schools in other countries, the U.S. is not doing very well.

Attitude Screening Becomes Increasingly Important

In an industry which suffers from such high turnover rates of employees and which finds many of those, even with specialized hospitality training, changing their occupational fields, a more definitive and encompassing process should be utilized to screen prospective students. This could help insure that students would probably complete their training, for it is not usually a lack of intellectual ability which causes failure, but rather a lack of motivation or attitudinal condition which is not compatible with the education or training being offered.

In a like manner, breaches in behavior or problems in the tourist employee encounter are often caused by attitudinal conditions which pre-exist the training and which were not able to be totally corrected by the unfreezing, movement, and refreezing processes required in attitudinal change.

It is, of course, important to know that some cultures expect an appointment to start late, that some do not eat certain meats, that some believe that women are not worthy of being introduced at social gatherings, or that some believe that one may stand too close while speaking with them, while others believe that standing too far away is an affront. It is also necessary that workers possess all the technical expertise, the conceptual abilities, and the humanistic qualities that are needed to perform their particular duties. But in meeting the needs of international guests with cultural differences, it is much more important that the employees be sensitive to the nuances which exist between themselves and their guests. To be tolerant and to have cultural empathy and the ability to adapt to requests, conditions, and special circumstances are only possible when the employee has the proper attitude to work in this type of industry.¹⁸

Stereotypes (although having some basic elements of truth), ethnocentric postures, racial hatreds, or insensitive behaviors must not be permitted to cloud a tourist experience or cause blockage of the satisfaction of a guest's legitimate needs.

Transactional analysis, role playing, languages, and cross cultural education can all, of course, play a great part in producing a well intentioned and knowledgeable employee who is able to respond to the needs

and wants of the international traveler. But with an apparent sameness in hotels and their facilities, and with only the employee being the real differing elements, it is more important that those who depend upon these employees to be the agents in meeting, greeting, and seating the guests have some better selection process.

If utilized in the hotel, technical, or trade school or in the hiring process at the individual facility, this process would provide an opportunity to determine if the prospective student or worker is receptive to the training to be received. Such a student or worker is realistic in his aims and aspirations, ready in his ability to receive training, and responsive to the needs of the guest, often someone very different from himself in language, dress, or degree of creature comforts desired.

The International Center of Glion, Switzerland, which attempts to maintain a close contact with its graduates and to ensure a continuous and ongoing attitudinal enlightenment program with its students, reports that 70 percent of its graduates who are members of its alumni society (which include 60 percent of its total graduates) are currently working in hospitality-related positions. But what of the others? The numbers of students in a classroom may give, in the short run, full-time equivalent statistics which could result in larger faculties, more job interviews on campus, and greater industry exposure to the program.

However, in the long run, differing results may be obtained as students who have attitudes which are not compatible with those required by the highly charged environment of the service aspects of hospitality fail to complete the academic programs, become disillusioned upon graduation and change to another occupation, or fail to do their jobs efficiently.

These conditions all result in a waste of educational resources, dissatisfied guests, and a confused and misdirected student who has wasted both his time and that of the institution, all because no proper evaluation was undertaken.

Attitude sampling through interviews, aptitude testing, or prior evaluation of work experiences must be used to properly screen potential students. Only in this way may schools be assured that training is not wasted, and that guest/employee encounters will produce pleasing and satisfactory results, results which cause a personal satisfaction within the worker in having accomplished a good job, and which give the guest the satisfaction of having his needs met.

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