

Ladies and gentlemen, at your service

The award-winning The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company prides itself on its process of selecting staff who are warm and caring.

In an organisation where all work begins with a focus on the customer, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company recognises that the very first step in a quality process involves placing people in roles they are most likely to be successful in. This focus led to the development of a Quality Selection Process (QSP) in partnership with Talent Plus, an international psychological selection and human resource consulting firm.

After being a finalist in the 1991 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award competition, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company made a second application in 1992. Redefined efforts of a quality programme resulted in The Ritz-Carlton becoming the first hotel company to win the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 1992. In 1999, it won the award a second time. This was the first time that a service company had won the award twice. Judges visited numerous hotels and interviewed over 1000 employees and managers to examine the total quality programme that The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company has in place.

That caring touch

The key to delivering exceptional service is knowing what the guest wants and then building service to prevent any difficulties from ever reaching and inconveniencing the guest, while minimising or eliminating defects. The first step in building that level of quality and commitment into this process is selecting and developing the right people. Sue Stephenson, senior vice president of human resources, notes, 'In a company where there are a million guest contacts a day, the guest wants to have a person to serve them who cares about them in a warm, genuine and personalised manner. Selecting "ladies and gentlemen" who are capable of serving customers in a warm, genuine manner is a critical activity in our work. We need to consistently select the people who are capable of creating a memorable experience.'

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company focuses on finding people to join their hotel group who are 'ladies and gentlemen'. Simon

Cooper, president/COO of The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, comments, 'The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company selects individuals who represent our organisation's values. We feel there is no substitute for people who can share our beliefs and want to serve with warmth and caring. By selecting the right people, we have been able to anticipate and surpass the needs of our guest.'

Quality counts

The measurable impact of the company's collective quality efforts have resulted in stabilising turnover from over 55 per cent in 1991 to under 25 per cent in 2002. Customer defects decreased from 25 per cent in 1991 to 7 per cent in 1994; 4.9 per cent in 1997, 3 per cent in 1998, and 1 per cent in 2000. For every 1 per cent increase in customer satisfaction, the company has been able to track a 2½ per cent increase in revenue per available room.

Talent Plus and The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company have worked very closely together to develop the QSP and set a standard of excellence in 'casting' the right person to the right job, ensuring the best guest service. By conducting research with employees and customising interviews, it is possible to identify candidates who are most likely to be like the best performers in specific jobs.

Consistent themes

The staff interview, which is one of the structured interviews validated for The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, was based on research and data collected in focus groups by asking open-ended questions. An interview was developed based on these data. This interview reveals those consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours of individuals that have become their life themes. These life themes are based on building relationships with guests; building supportive relationships with staff; enthusiasm, sensitivity to others' needs and spontaneous care for others.

The staff themes were discovered by studying those employees who were most effective, according to objective measures, such as

sales performance, attendance, workers' compensation, and guest complaints, taking into account management evaluations.

Common language of success

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company uses a structured interview that is measurable and repeatable for multiple candidates. The increased efficiency is due to a model built around those who have been most successful in the organisation. The common language of success enables improved training and development programmes to be planned for each employee.

Over 1000 'ladies and gentlemen' have been trained on the staff interview in over 52 Ritz-Carlton hotels across the globe. Each hotel has a resident trainer who is certified to train new interviewers as well as to ensure QSP standards are met.

The structured interview process provides behaviour-based data, which directly correlate to the future performance of a candidate before making the final selection or promotion decision. Users of the technology over a number of years are able to see the impact of this common language of success and its impact on selection, promotion, training and development.

Since 1991, Talent Plus has partnered with The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company to continuously improve the selection process. In 1994, a sales manager benchmark was established that

demonstrated a \$1.4 million difference in sales volume comparing top to contrast Ritz-Carlton SalesManagers.

A Talent Benchmark™ for each position within the company – from executive, manager, supervisor and first-line service positions – was established. Candidates can be compared to the appropriate benchmark, enabling The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company to identify individuals who are most like their top performers and who exhibit the attributes and behaviours they wish to hire. The structured interviews have been translated into over 20 languages and cultural studies have been completed in many countries.

Right first time

Service-driven organisations know all too well that they have only one opportunity to make a good first impression. Organisations can no longer rely on traditional training methods to develop the quality behaviours that are necessary to be spontaneously produced in a service environment. A comprehensive total quality management programme begins with the quality selection of high-performing and service-oriented individuals and then developing them so that they implement the right quality behaviour.

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company is a proven leader in providing 'world class' guest service and has set the standard of excellence with a talent-based organisation. [HMI](#)