

Customer Service Case Study



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Debrah Dhugga, Managing Director, DUKES LONDON

DUKES LONDON creates world-class customer service

The challenge

Once a favourite with the Queen Mother and Diana, Princess of Wales, when DUKES LONDON Hotel was given the opportunity of a fresh start, it had to find a way of creating an energised team that would play to their strengths and bring the hotel's brand values to life...

Debrah Dhugga, managing director, explains, "DUKES LONDON Hotel is a hidden gem in Mayfair, tucked away behind St James's Palace. When the owners chose to stop using a management company in favour of working more closely with the hotel and giving me more responsibility, we grasped the opportunity with both hands, not least because without fresh impetus, we risked losing our five-star status – and that was unthinkable."

She adds, "We wanted to create new energy in the team and look again at where we wanted to go with the hotel. We knew one of greatest assets was the strength of our people and how they added to guest experiences. The aim was to build on this quality, to make each experience exceptional in every way. Crucial to achieving that was to develop the whole team from top to bottom, to get everyone working together towards a shared vision of what we all wanted DUKES LONDON to be."

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The approach

"To help us get our approach right when it came to setting the hotel's new mission and values, we decided to appoint Hunter Roberts," says Debrah. "As well as having an outstanding track record for delivering brand engagement at other luxury brands, the fact that they were leading people development programmes for well-known professional, services, financial and retail names on an international scale meant they could also share best practice from across the business world."

She adds, "Hunter Roberts helped us to start the process by bringing together the five members of the executive team to look at the heart and soul of the operation, now and in the future. What should the experience look and feel like for guests? How can we motivate and energise people to want to provide that level of service? Hunter Roberts helped us answer those questions by looking at ways of enabling our leaders to play to their strengths. Instead of looking at what we *weren't* good at, the more positive focus allowed us to celebrate what we *could* do and come up with ways of enabling people with different strengths to support each other and do more of what they really excelled at. The next step was to create a leadership development programme."

The solution

“Hunter Roberts created an ongoing leadership development programme based on the findings from the mission and values discussion,” says Debrah. “This put a new focus on ‘care, consistency and passion’, which we used to look at the particular strengths of all the individuals and operations, and start planning how to use and develop everyone’s strengths over time. Each leader was given an understanding of their own leadership style and feedback on how to use this to create a management toolkit that would deliver the vision.”

She adds, “By helping us create a cohesive senior team with a clear vision of what they’re trying to achieve, Hunter Roberts enabled us to roll out the approach through day-to-day management and ongoing workshops for all our staff. The clarity of direction this has provided has been crucial for getting everyone engaged with delivering change. And the traditional industry approach to management – reactive and on-the-spot – has been replaced with more structured opportunities for staff to sit down, reflect and discuss experiences, alongside continual training and development.”

The results

“Since Hunter Roberts helped us to adopt a strengths-based approach to leadership, we’ve seen tangible benefits within our team,” says Debrah. “With the new leadership team in place we went on to win AA Hotel of the Year London 2013/14, AA Hospitality Awards 2013/14 and a four-star rating from Forbes. We’ve retained our UK five-star status and been described in an influential US travel guide as providing ‘Britain’s warmest welcome.’”

She adds, “Best of all, staff have become much better at reading and responding to guests. There’s a significant difference between a guest who’s relying on a quick and efficient service as part of a business trip and someone wanting to savour the experience and get to know people. By helping our leaders to understand how the service we give our guests is directly linked to how we treat our employees, our people feel part of a family-business environment. They have pride in their place and what they’re achieving. Hunter Roberts has helped us to create a wonderful team. We’re all one family and we roll our sleeves up to help each other.”

Debrah concludes, “At DUKES LONDON we’re excited to be growing - starting with the opening of a new DUKES hotel in Dubai in 2016, where we’ll be looking to use Hunter Roberts again to build a new executive team.”

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