

The Dorchester Collection is a portfolio of the world's foremost five star luxury hotels in London, Beverly Hills, Paris and Milan. A subsidiary of the Brunei Investment Group, it is committed to cultivating the reputation and individual character of each hotel, and preserving the highest possible standards of service and excellence. Global sales and marketing support is centred on more than 50 sales managers in the hotels themselves, supplemented by sales offices in North America, Japan, the UK and Russia.

The Business Challenge

The Dorchester Collection has instigated exciting plans to more than double its portfolio of properties in major cities in Europe and North America. Each hotel within the group is unique and has its own, very distinctive personality, which is carefully nurtured by a local executive team. A small head office in London provides overall financial and management support to the group. As the group's expansion strategy began to take shape, it became apparent that the existing hotels were not taking full advantage of the benefits of belonging to the Dorchester 'family'. Furthermore, the directors were keen that all staff in each hotel, really did 'live and breathe' the Dorchester service values.

Whilst individual operations were running well, there was little contact between staff at the different hotels, and as a result managers often struggled in isolation to deal with similar business and human resource issues. In addition there was little cross-selling between hotels, widely differing levels of commercial awareness and inconsistencies in areas such as performance management and financial control.

"We realised that we needed to develop synergies across the group so that we could share best practice, take advantage of economies of scale, increase profitability and set ourselves up for future growth," explained Assistant Operations Manager, Paul King.

The Solution

The head office team worked with Hunter Roberts and, led by Susy Roberts, embarked on a series of familiarisation meetings with a cross section of key employees from all the hotels to develop an in-depth understanding of the business. Susy explained; "we felt it was important to get a real understanding of people's roles and challenges, to experience their working environment and get to grips with the culture of the group. Familiarisation meetings helped us to understand what made each hotel unique. We wanted to capitalise on the individual hotel's unparalleled service experience, but still give guests the feeling that they were undoubtedly in a Dorchester Collection property.

This research exercise helped to pinpoint some of the key, common issues managers were facing – as well as providing important intelligence about specific problems and opportunities at individual hotels. The results were fed back to the executive team, together with suggestions for the type of approach that would facilitate cross-hotel learning and stimulate ideas for new ways of working more efficiently. Senior executives from the parent Brunei Investment Group were also heavily involved in the discussions, as it was felt that commitment to the project from the very top was vital if it was to have maximum impact.

Hunter Roberts delivered a series of ten workshops that would involve 120 staff from across the five hotels. Delegates were grouped into workshops according to their specialist areas – such as finance, HR, food and beverage, front-of-house or purchasing – so that they could share their experiences and learn from each other. The workshops lasted five days and included a mix of creative, practical and fun activities. Delegates attended sessions on change management, branding, communication and commercial awareness. They also took part in facilitated discussions on some of their most pressing management and human resources issues.

As part of an exercise on identifying corporate values, participants were challenged to make a short video demonstrating the values of the Dorchester Collection. The films were ‘premiered’ the following evening at an Oscar-style dinner. Other activities included role plays, facilitated networking and social events designed to help people get to know each other better. All activities were facilitated by the Hunter Roberts team, together with a specially commissioned business actor.

Measuring Success

The immediate feedback from delegates was extremely positive. “It was a truly valuable experience. I now feel I know everyone at our sister properties and can pick up the phone and call them,” said Bruce Campbell, Director of Security at the Beverley Hills Hotel. The ideas and issues raised at the workshops were collated and turned into action plans for each specialist area. As a direct result, a number of significant operational changes were made.

For example, the group has opened a sales office in New York and has completely re-structured its purchasing department. Financial reporting procedures have been standardised and HR practices are being reviewed to ensure consistency. Assistant Operations Manager Paul King says the hotels are already seeing the benefits of the project in terms of improved efficiency and profitability. But he believes perhaps the most valuable outcome has been the improvement in relationships between managers across the group.

“People are now much better able to communicate, pool their experience and draw on each others’ expertise. They clearly now feel that they belong to a family and that the head office team is there to support them,” he says. “Managers have really bought into what we are trying to



achieve as a group, and I feel we are a much stronger company now than we were six months ago.”

Ricci Obertelli, Global Development Director of the Group, reports directly to the Board of Directors based in Brunei, and is responsible for directing the Group’s expansion strategy worldwide, as well as developing the brand across the globe. He commented that this was “easily the best development intervention his staff had been on”, and that Hunter Roberts work was “outstanding” and “the best training he had seen in the hotel industry”.

Hunter Roberts were asked to work with the Brunei Investment Group in Brunei together with the Dorchester Collection general managers to help them understand what we had achieved and how this model could be used with their other hotels.