

## Turning Star Hotel Employees into Effective Managers

It is one thing to identify and encourage star employees. It is another to support, train, and move them in the right direction to be effective managers. At The Fairmont Winnipeg, developing their leaders of tomorrow is part of a formal strategy to help the hotel succeed in a competitive market.

“The hotel business begins and ends with people – the right people in the right places,” says Terri Lee Farber, Director of Human Resources.

Finding and keeping those right people is more difficult as the competition increases for a decreasingly available labour pool. Not only is The Fairmont competing with external companies for the same people, they are competing with their sister hotels around the world who may offer appealing amenities including a snow-free year.

Despite the competition, The Fairmont Winnipeg has been able to attract and retain excellent staff. Their success is founded on the hotel’s formal planning to ‘energize’ its star employees and help move them into successful, effective managers. The plan includes three strategies:

1. Strengthen the leadership bench strength.

“We need to have more people in a ready position to allow us to promote from within,” explains Farber. “If there is a gap for any reason, we can implement our commitment to hire people already in development mode.”

2. Understand colleague needs and values.

It’s one thing to identify an apparent ‘star’ employee but if that individual has different aspirations it’s critical that the employee and management communicate. Part of this understanding also includes recognizing generational differences in expectations and long-term objectives. Today’s younger workers may expect to be more mobile than older workers.

“We need to understand what people want, what their talents are, and to do this as part of the recruiting and hiring process so we can fit the job to the people rather than trying to ‘fix’ them into a position,” adds Farber.

3. Ensure accountability for retention and development

“Accountability means having a pulse on performance,” says Farber. “We have annual employee engagement surveys to get a sense of leadership in different areas.”

This strategy also involves building and living a ‘culture’ of recruitment and retention that goes beyond the Human Resources department and extends throughout the company. Everyone is involved in the development of staff for the future.

Implementing these strategies and focusing on hiring and developing staff with an eye to leadership helps The Fairmont enjoy a high retention rate and an ability to promote from within.

These are key elements in the success of a company, not only because they cut down on the high costs of turnover but also because they help build the 'culture' of the company.

"The success of the strategies has been evident several ways," Farber says. "By identifying and developing 'stars,' we have been able to create an internal succession plan."

Farber is quick to note that there is no quick fix. The focus on hiring the best talent is the start of the process and it must continue; it's not a one-time event. Once the talent is hired, their abilities and interests must be understood, developed, and encouraged. Strong leadership, effective training, and recognition are integral aspects of the longer-term steps to retain the company's 'greatest asset.'

"Turning talent into value must start with the hiring process. Don't compromise," Farber concludes.