

# MARRIOTT LEADS THE WAY TO CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Marriott International knows that customer satisfaction is directly related to its managers' ability to motivate their frontline customer-care associates. Thus, in a company for which repeat business and brand loyalty are vital, the training of new managers has a direct effect on the bottom line.

Marriott is by no means unique. All companies in the lodging and hospitality industries and most in other industries face similar challenges. So, why focus on Marriott? The best answer is that it has been singularly successful in achieving high levels of customer satisfaction. In J.D. Power and Associates' most recent North America Hotel Guest Satisfaction Index Study, two Marriott brands scored highest in their segments: The Ritz-Carlton Hotel topped the Luxury Segment and had the best score in the entire survey; and SpringHill Suites by Marriott had the highest score in the Mid-Price Limited Service Segment. In addition, three brands placed second in their segments: Renaissance Hotels and Resorts, Courtyard by Marriott, and Residence Inn by Marriott. All told, Marriott brands placed first or second in five of the six segments into which Power divided the industry.

This success depends critically on frontline customer-care associates and how they are managed. All new managers participate in an intensive training workshop that emphasizes the achievement of customer satisfaction. The four-day Foundations of Leadership program is offered 25 times per year for managers in full-service hotels. It also includes pre-work and follow-up. New managers in extended-stay and franchised properties participate in the three-day Business Management course, which offers most of the same content.

The key to successful leadership and communication in the fluid and complex environment of a hotel is self-awareness and awareness of others. "In Day 1," says Nancy Curtin Morris, Marriott's National Director of Training, "we start with an explanation of our corporate culture and then move directly to the question 'Who are you?' We begin with what the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*<sup>®</sup> assessment can tell our new managers about themselves. After a 60-minute introduction of the principles and uses of psychological type, we hand out to the

participants their individual Myers-Briggs<sup>®</sup> results; each previously completed the instrument online.

"We also hand out the *Introduction to Type*<sup>®</sup> in *Organizations* booklet. When the discussion turns from what Myers-Briggs results tell them about themselves to what they say about others, you see light bulbs go on in terms of their understanding of the people they work with. That's when they realize they can adjust their styles for dealing with both staff and supervisors."

In Day 2, the Foundations of Leadership course moves from "Who are you?" to "How do you fit?" Sensitivity to one's own and others' type preferences plays a significant part in this segment as well. In Day 4, the group is divided into six-person teams for a hotel management business simulation. "Before the simulation begins," reports Morris, "we set aside time for each team to discuss how the Myers-Briggs types of the team members may affect their working together. The result is improved teamwork. For example, a team with five Extraverted members concluded that it should make special efforts to ensure the inclusion of its single Introvert."

Myers-Briggs content was added to the Foundations of Leadership curriculum a year and a half ago. Since then, Morris has seen type awareness spread throughout the company. Some program graduates have had the training delivered to their staff. And, although Foundations of Leadership is designed for new managers, one Marriott business unit provides the program for its senior managers as well.

"Our focus on customer service has been strong for more than 70 years," says Morris. "The added focus on understanding your own and others' psychological type is making it even better. Self-understanding and the ability to 'read' others can make a big difference. Communications can be tailored to the recipient, and the communicator knows when and if he or she is not getting through. Teamwork is more effective. Learning about type preferences inevitably makes it easier for both managers and their staff to understand and relate to customers—and that is where the payoff comes in."

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