



Nurturing the new generation of Managers

A Northwest Visitor Economy Exemplar

It's great when you get promoted isn't it? However, after the excitement fades, sometimes you can be daunted by moving into a role for which you have no specialist training, particularly if you have never managed people before.

This is the situation for many employees within the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industries. Recent research has identified that staff in this sector are promoted rapidly to supervisory and management positions, but little or no training is given to support them in their new roles.

Getting with the programme

Luckily, help is at hand for first line managers and supervisors in Merseyside where an innovative programme is addressing this training shortfall. Thanks to funding from The Mersey Partnership (TMP), Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the bespoke 'Talent Programme' has been up and running since 2006 at a subsidised cost of £100 per learner – a tenth of the market price one would expect to pay for a programme of this level and scope.

Created specifically to benefit managers in tourism, hospitality and leisure, the Talent Programme has two main elements. Firstly, participants study in groups for a recognised management qualification: the level 3 award in first line management (ILM). Over a seven month period delegates attend eight off-site learning

days, taught by the professional training company 'The Learning Curve', at the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce. They are also expected to complete self study that will count towards the ILM qualification.

Marvellous mentors

But what sets this training programme apart from others is its second magic ingredient. Whilst studying, each learner supplements their new knowledge with five hours of advice and guidance from one-to-one sessions with designated industry mentors. These volunteers are typically senior figures recruited from a range of businesses within the private, public and voluntary sectors. Many were motivated to join the programme by the belief that their expertise could benefit others in the industry, which would help Merseyside improve its reputation for talent within tourism, hospitality and leisure.

So that's where the mentors come from - what about the students? According to feedback from the first three Talent Programmes, some were selected by their employer or line manager because they showed potential. Others, new to a management or supervisory role, wanted to take the opportunity to improve or refresh specific management skills. The Programme was also recommended to other students by colleagues who had already experienced the course and mentoring and found it beneficial. The rest of the learners were simply attracted by the format of the training: that it was part-subsidised, away from their workplace and included mentoring.

Back to school

June Johnson, Banqueting Manager at the Leasowe Castle Hotel on the Wirral, was asked if she wanted to take part in the course by her boss Peter Atherton: "It was like he was letting me know I was ready for the next level. I left school when I was 15 with no qualifications, so this was the first bit of learning I've done for 35 years. I struggled a bit with some of the jargon and big words to start with but the tutors helped me and my mentor was lovely. Now I've passed the Programme I'd love to go for the NVQ Level 4 in Management and I know Mr Atherton will support me with this."



Peter is also thrilled with the results of the Programme: "I know my staff feel valued and recognised because they've had time during work to gain new skills. I notice that they support each other more now and their communications skills have improved." He was so impressed he decided to become a mentor himself: "Some of the mentees I've worked with were absolute superstars and just didn't realise it, so I've been able to help them find their confidence."

Educating Rita

One such person is Rita Jones who has worked at another hotel, the Crowne Plaza in Liverpool, for



five years. Rita started as a part-time housekeeper and has worked her way up to become the Manager of the Harbour Club in 2007. Her General Manager Stephen

Roberts selected her for the Talent Programme as he thought it would be ideal experience for Rita's role and recent promotion. Rita looked forward to the benefits the training would bring: "I hoped it might help me with my confidence, because it was quite a jump in responsibility from being a Team Leader to a Manager."

She wasn't disappointed. "I feel personally that I've changed and grown as a result of Talent – I'm more confident, I deal with people much better, and feel more respected. I've become a much stronger person, and because I understand my staff and their behaviour more, I'm able to build a stronger team."

Her boss Stephen has secured a number of places for his staff on the Talent Programme since it started in 2006 as he could see how it would develop leadership potential in this way in his organisation. He has since found that the Programme has also helped him to build up a consistent level of service delivery. Participating managers have made efficiencies, improved profitability, are staying longer in their posts and are more motivated.

Time to learn

The Everyman Playhouse in Liverpool has also reaped the benefits of signing its employees up for the seven month programme: "It allows the learner to step back and take proper time to let all the formal training and knowledge sink in from the course," believes Christine Matthews-Sheen, Director.

Rosalind Gordon, Deputy Box Office Manager at the Everyman, found the modules easy to follow and enjoyed interacting with her peers: "Discussing management strategies with other people from the leisure sector was great. We were all supervisors or managers but none of us had had much formal training before."



Rosalind also found the support from her mentor invaluable: "We met about once a month and discussed my work based assignment and any issues at work I was struggling with. He was a great sounding board, made suggestions and asked questions which led me to come up with solutions to problems myself. I feel very proud of what I have achieved both during the course and afterwards."

Putting it into practice

Eighty-nine per cent of learners from Talent 1, 2 and 3 report that they have managed to apply their new skills at work. Examples include:

- They can delegate more, thanks to better time management, the creation of job lists and work load prioritisation
- Their improved listening and motivation techniques enable them to get more out of team members
- They are able to set personal and team objectives and monitor them effectively
- They are better at supervising staff and have a more structured approach to training
- They are more confident about recruiting new staff
- They can implement change in the workplace and handle staff conflicts effectively
- Their new personal approach and attitude to others leads to better team results

This positive feedback confirms that the two pronged approach of formal training and mentoring, is a winning combination. Students aren't the only ones to benefit though, mentors have too. Those that took part in the first three Talent Programmes reported enjoying the experience: interacting with their mentees and seeing their contribution make a difference to that individual, their thinking and overall achievement. Ninety-four per cent of these mentors felt positive that they had 'given something back' to the industry.

In conclusion

In a short space of time, the Talent Programme has exceeded its ambitions to genuinely impact on learners, mentors and participating businesses and fill the managerial skills gap in the hospitality, tourism and leisure industries. The Programmes have gone from strength to strength: Talent 6 started in April 2008 with 26 learners. To date there are 82 trained industry mentors. However, from

2009 the plan is to have only one course per year starting in September. "To run 3 programmes per year has required intensive administrative support, significant funding and the good will of a lot of people, especially senior managers who have given their time freely to the programme. As the funding reduces, we believe that one programme will allow us to maximise this goodwill and ensure there are sufficient people available as mentors given the level of movement in the sector. Equally, once the first flush of enthusiasm has passed and the price increases it will be more difficult to fill multiple programmes" explained Karen Illingworth, Tourism Skills Manager at the Mersey Partnership who has co-ordinated and managed the Talent Programme since its inception.

By engaging past participants as advocates, TMP now has the opportunity to promote the success of the Talent Programme to a wider range of businesses in Merseyside. Many of these students now want to carry on learning, invest in training and mentoring for their staff, and one day become mentors themselves. This shows that the Programme has delivered an immediate benefit, and it is inspiring a generation of supervisors and managers to continually update their skills and pass them on to other up and coming employees in the industry.



The Talent Programme has helped to change attitudes towards learning and set the standard for collaboration between young talent and experienced professionals.

For more information on the Talent Programme:

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