

IN THE **details**

Deal with staff diversity

- Attitude complicates situation
- Understand cultural barriers
- Increase staff interaction

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Awareness training bridges cultural gaps

When people of different cultures are thrown together in the workplace without a common language or cultural understanding, it can take a toll on a hotel's productivity and service. But thanks to multicultural awareness training that bridges the gaps between cultures, a diverse work force can learn not

only to communicate better but also to work together to deliver excellent guest service.

When the labor market dried up around the King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort in St. Simons Island, Ga., the resort increased its hiring from the rapidly growing Hispanic immigrant community. Many did not speak English. Complicating the

situation was an attitude among some longtime English-speaking associates that the onus was entirely on the new entrants to learn the culture, language and job-specific skills. But the immigrants initially were not interested in blending in. Their mindset was to work and go through whatever was necessary to earn money to send back to their

families.

The language barrier made hiring, training and supervising a problem. New hires didn't feel comfortable learning or doing their jobs without getting direction in their own language, and Spanish-speaking associates with some English literacy were unwilling to become supervisors. We knew that teaching new associates to be friendly and responsive to guests and associates was a problem bigger than we could solve with our own training.

training.

We called in Spanglish Unlimited, a Raleigh, N.C., consulting company that recommended and provided bilingual job aids for the housekeeping and food-and-beverage departments and a Spanish and English cultural awareness workshop.

In the workshop, Spanglish's president, Hugh Avera, described our Hispanic associates' lives before coming to America, mentioning how they lacked basic things we take for granted, like telephones and transportation, fueling their primary aspirations to help their families at home financially. As our faces softened showing understanding, I could see the Hispanic associates become empowered. Their expressions were saying, "Now you understand. It's not that we're resistant, it's just that we don't know." A similar workshop, presented entirely in Spanish, helped them understand our culture better as well.

The King and Prince is shining now. Productivity and service have improved. The resort has won several hotel industry awards. Would that have happened without multicultural training? Perhaps, but I think not. As a trainer, I believe that guests don't go back to places where there is a lack of positive interaction among staff. So we must treat each other the way we treat our guests.

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