

customer asks for it. Guests today have knowledge of amenities totally different from guests of five years ago. There is a higher level of sophistication, higher expectations, because our customers travel. So there is an evolution – a constant revolution of new expectations.

(Green, 2000: 3)

To ensure the training is targeted appropriately and the material is relevant an important part of the TQM process is a focus on information and analysis.

Information and analysis

Ritz-Carlton places great emphasis on knowing what their guests desire, even to the point of anticipating those desires. To achieve this the company must measure and analyse their guests, which is a most challenging task if they are meant to be relaxing or are otherwise engaged, but the effort put into this is one of the key features distinguishing this company from its competitors.

It starts with 'understanding customers in detail'. Key processes in the customer-staff relationships are 'dissected to identify points at which errors may occur' in the company's bid to eliminate all errors. For example, Ritz-Carlton has determined that 'there are 970 potential instances for a problem to arise during interactions with overnight guests and 1071 such instances during interactions with meeting event planners' (Mene, 1999: 3). This degree of information and analysis makes it possible to determine where problems are most likely to occur and to prepare staff to handle them, be it a mundane issue regarding ice for drinks in the room or the unusual, such as managing the appearance of a wild animal mascot at a convention.

In addition to events and interactions the company seeks to cultivate customer loyalty through customer customization. This process 'relies on extensive data gathering' regarding the guest using 'the capabilities of advanced information technology'. The information is gathered during 'various types of customer contacts' or 'post-event reviews conducted with meeting planners'. So the million or so files held in the Ritz-Carlton data base can ensure James Bond's martini is shaken and not stirred, and that Corporation X places more importance on the chef's famous desserts than the team-building exercises available at the resort.

Empowerment

An important element in ensuring the steady quality improvement that has led to the Baldrige Awards is the empowering of staff, 'giving them