

Question-Driven Leadership

audacious group performance



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Case Study: A Boutique Hotel Owner is Stuck Micromanaging

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Situation: The main function of the owner of a boutique inn located in a popular destination town was to market the business locally and regionally. However, she found herself caught up in the day-to-day operations of the business, in spite of having a hotel manager. With that reality, she could not devote the time she needed in order to do marketing. The entire staff was only ten people total, with some departments consisting of only one employee who doubled as his or her own supervisor. Each one was maxed out with their own list of responsibilities. Moreover, they all knew that if the situation continued, the inn would close and they would all be out of work, which meant that they all had a personal stake in the outcome.

Process: Using the Segue™ process, the first question the staff chose to address was, “How can we free up more time for [name, the owner] to do marketing?” Both of the owners as well as the hotel manager sat in the circle with everyone’s voice considered equal. As the question circled the group several times, the staff members saw how they could streamline their individual operations and eliminate duplicate trips to the office supply store, the laundry, trips up and down the stairs, etc.

Results: They came up with a stunningly detailed and radical reorientation of their job descriptions and schedules which no one could have anticipated, much less instituted. The fact that everyone on the staff contributed to the new plan meant that everyone bought into it and implemented it with no resistance and no coercion. The changes not only freed the owner entirely from the day-to-day operations so she could do the necessary marketing activities, but it simplified everyone else’s work as well.

Next situation: Because of the seasonality of the location, they often found themselves overwhelmed when the crowds showed up. In addition, the nature of the hospitality industry means a fairly high turnover rate and considerable time spent training new people.

Process: In a follow-up Segue™, they chose the question, “How can we use the off-season to prepare for the busy season?” Inspired and pleased with their initial problem-solving abilities, they took on the next problem with the enthusiasm of a sculptor taking on the next chunk of marble.

Results: First, they agreed it would help for everyone to cross train in all the other positions. This added flexibility alleviated the crunch when a baby sitter cancelled or a car wouldn't start. (The idea to cross train and the enthusiasm to take it on came entirely from the employees.)

Second, the lead person in each department created a manual covering all the details of their responsibilities for the purpose of training temporary help and replacements.

Third, today, the business experiences a higher-than-normal employee retention rate because of the atmosphere created by the staff practicing the skill of creating well-thought out questions for solving every magnitude of problem and listening to one another.

Conclusion: Given responsibility for solving operational problems, the staff created a culture of ownership for the success of the entire business, including details such as the impeccable dusting of the elaborate and ornate decorations in the lobby and fireplace room. In turn, the employees took real interest in the owner's marketing efforts. The employees' intelligence and imagination and good will were honored, and that honor translates into superior service for the guests and a smoother work flow behind the scenes.