

The Issue

The four star Maryborough Hotel & Spa in Douglas, County Cork has undergone extensive expansion and investment since first being opened by owners Dan and Josephine O'Sullivan in 1997. The hotel facilities now comprise 93 bedrooms, including five suites in the old house, a 10,000 square foot spa, a leisure club, 11 conference and banqueting rooms, a 140 seater restaurant and extensive public areas and bar facilities.

The hotel operates in an increasingly competitive environment which has seen 1,000 additional beds being added to the hotel stock in the Cork area in the recent past. Furthermore, many of Maryborough's closest competitors are part of hotel groups and have those central resources and scale to draw upon in attracting guests and competing for business.

"We are a relatively small, privately owned hotel", explains General Manager Justin McCarthy. "We do not have group support to fall back on. We have to do everything for ourselves, this means that the team here has to operate to its optimum level at all times. We have to be the best at what we do, this is the only way that we can compete.

The Response

This pursuit of excellence led the team at the Maryborough Hotel to sign up for the Ireland's Best Programme in 2001. This standard was quickly achieved and Maryborough followed that up with the achievement of the Optimus Mark of Best Practice.

"This is the second level of the Fáilte Ireland Optimus Programme", says McCarthy. "These two awards helped us greatly with staff training and assisted with improved management practices. Nevertheless we wanted to achieve excellence throughout the organisation so it was natural for us to move on to the top tier of the programme and to seek the Award of Excellence in the Business Excellence Programme."

The Award of Excellence is based on the best enterprises in Europe, using the standards of the European Foundation for Quality Management. To achieve it, businesses need not only demonstrate a deep commitment to continual



"Achieving the Award of Excellence has delivered real benefits to all aspects of the business. It has helped us develop real joined up management thinking. There is awareness in all departments of the activities of the other departments. Everyone understands the importance of the outputs of everyone else and this helps with overall productivity and teamworking."

Maryborough Hotel & Spa Owner
and Managing Director Dan O'Sullivan.

OPTIMUS – CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

improvement and superior performance but also a proactive attitude to the changing social, economic and market conditions in which they operate.

Companies that achieve sustainable excellence display a strong results orientation, a passionate customer focus, a commitment to management by processes and sound performance measures, and an abiding enthusiasm for continual learning and innovation based on rigorous benchmarking. Once the required level of excellence has been achieved by a company it is presented with the prestigious Award of Excellence, a tangible recognition of the organisation's status as both an outstanding performer within the hospitality sector and an exceptional achiever across different sectors.

"The systems we have put in place mean that if we need to replace anyone in almost any position we will be able to do so by internal promotion. Furthermore, in terms of recruitment, people will be attracted to come and work in a hotel which operates to business excellence standards."

Maryborough House Hotel
General Manager Justin McCarthy

The Experience

Setting out on the path to achieve the Business Excellence award was not quite the culture shock that might have been expected. "The previous two programmes had prepared us very well", says McCarthy.

The route towards the award began with the appointment of Human Resources Manager Kate McGrath to take responsibility for the project and the effective deconstruction of the business into its various constituent elements. "Kate led the project from start to finish and was instrumental in our success", McCarthy continues. "We broke the business down into 13 separate processes including leadership, strategic planning, sales and marketing, financial management, human resources, food production and so on. Each process was given an owner whose task was to analyse it and to work with the team in that area to optimise it and help it contribute more to the overall success of the hotel."

This involved each process being broken down into further sub-processes. Each of these sub-processes was analysed and reviewed to maximise its efficiency and optimise it. Each member of staff was challenged to view their area of operation in terms of how it impacted on the operation of the hotel as a whole. They were also empowered not only to make suggestions as to how these processes and operations could be improved but actually to make the improvements themselves.



“This was absolutely central to the process”, Justin McCarthy points out. “Staff now have the authority to solve problems in their own areas. Senior management doesn’t have to get involved in everything. Structures are now in place whereby continuous improvement is being carried out in all areas of the organisation on an ongoing basis. This frees up senior management to focus on the key strategic issues as they arise.”

This resulted in the establishment of quality improvement teams in each of the thirteen key process areas with impressive results.

The Outcome

The process of review, analysis and improvement culminated at the end of 2006 when the Maryborough Hotel & Spa was granted the prestigious Optimus Award of Excellence.

A key factor in the achievement was the buy-in of the staff. "Every member of our 130 strong staff has taken ownership of all of the improvements which we have achieved", says McCarthy. "And these improvements covered every aspect of our activities from customer retention to waste reduction."

He also pays tribute to the management team who led the effort. "We have a 15 person management team here and they all put in a huge amount of their own time on the project. Apart from doing their own work they put in extra time both on the project and in supporting each other. I also have to pay tribute to Fáilte Ireland whose assistance and support has been invaluable in achieving this award."

In terms of results on the ground, McCarthy says they are ultimately measured by the bottom line. "On every measure possible our participation in this programme has delivered real benefits", he says. "Food percentage, beverage percentage, staff retention, customer satisfaction, customer retention, and bottom line profitability – improvements have been registered in every area. We are right up there with the very best in the country on all of those measures."

Contacts

Tony Lenehan.
Tel No. 884 7722.
Email: tony.lenehan@failteireland.ie

Denis Tucker.
Tel No. 884 7716.
Email: denis.tucker@failteireland.ie