

Awards make sense



Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority was established in 2003 to guide and promote tourism as a leading component of the Irish economy. Within its charter to promote best practice in the tourism and hospitality sector, Fáilte Ireland has implemented its own quality programme, 'Optimus', which includes hotel specific initiatives as well as promoting application for the EFQM levels of Excellence.

Among the initial challenges of this mission were to encourage the ambition of Ireland's highly regarded family owned hotels, to higher levels of service. "Many local hoteliers think that 'excellence' is all about providing better facilities", says Denis Tucker of Fáilte Ireland, "We had to lift their horizons to look at best practice outside of Ireland. The international hotel chains generally don't need to do this: they have internal quality programmes and training that has been developed from best practice elsewhere... Our focus has been on convincing the owners and managers of family owned hotels – which include the most charming and original hotels in Ireland – to institutionalise consistent quality and seek improvement."

So what difference do awards make? "Everybody loves the idea of winning an award," says Denis, "for the hotel owners it offers an obvious opportunity for extra publicity and something to differentiate themselves from their competitors. More importantly, hotel staff genuinely find the goal of competing for an award motivating: it helps to get everyone on board - committed to implementing change".

"The concept of People Development and Involvement was one of the key features of the EFQM Excellence Model which appealed to us." comments Justin McCarthy of the Maryborough hotel and spa, "The hotel employs 140 staff and every single one of them is involved in one way or another in the EFQM Excellence Programme. The Optimus and EFQM Models have helped to increase our productivity, our profitability, and reduce staff turnover... We are now looking at the problems that the industry will potentially face five years down the road, as well as identifying opportunities that may arise."

On the strength of these results, the Maryborough Hotel was recently rewarded with 'EFQM Recognised for Excellence Level 4'. But who needs such an award? Does it really make a difference to what employees think about working for the hotel? Justin McCarthy thinks that the boost in morale has a wide ranging impact:

"When you have managers in a position for a long time... some senior people, including me, have been here since the hotel opened, over ten years ago... you need to find new ways to motivate these people otherwise they can lose their edge and become complacent... We want to attract the best people to work here, and the Optimus and EFQM recognition gives us something different to offer and provides us with a competitive advantage in the marketplace for new sources of business, labour and talent."