



Cotton Takes Chair

People 1st has named British Hospitality Association chief executive Bob Cotton as chairman of the new National Skills Academy for Hospitality.

The appointment follows Government sign-off of the People 1st business plan to launch the Academy drawing in over £100 million of government investment for the 66,000 additional learners it will provide for the industry.

The Academy bid was co-ordinated by People 1st, along with key partners such as Barceló Hotels, Compass Group, Terry Laybourne and the Edge Foundation, and represents an unprecedented shift in funding for the training in hospitality.

Cotton has held the role of chief executive of the BHA for over 8 years, and the organisation currently represents over 9,000 hotels, 11,000 restaurants and 19,000 contract catering units.

Brian Wisdom, chief executive of People 1st commented: "We are delighted to announce Bob's appointment as chair for the National Skills Academy. He has demonstrated his absolute commitment to improving skills for the hospitality industry."

"People 1st and its partners have attracted a massive amount of funding which will now be put into training for hospitality, and we look forward to working with Bob to ensure that the Academy delivers for our industry."

One of the first steps for the Academy is to appoint a chief executive who will be in charge of its operation. Details of the role and how to apply are available at www.people1st.co.uk/appointments

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Leading the Way in Customer Service

Customer service is one of the main topics on the People 1st agenda, and something that we will be looking at in more depth in future editions of Talent.

With global events like the upcoming 2012 Olympic Games attracting more visitors than ever to the UK, the business benefits of improving customer service should not be ignored, and preparing the sector to provide a great experience for international visitors, as well as our own UK customers, is essential.

When discussing customer service, the spotlight often falls on front line staff, but Caroline Perkins, Head of Research at People 1st, suggests that managers also have a significant part to play.

She says: "Customer service and management and leadership are two of our main focuses as an organisation, but what many don't realise is that there is quite a lot of crossover between the two.

Support from managers and supervisors, customer-focused processes, reward and recognition mechanisms for staff, and feedback mechanisms for customers all have an important role in raising service standards.

We know that supervisors and line managers play a crucial role in developing the customer service skills of frontline staff and ensuring consistently good levels of service. They therefore need to understand the importance of customer service and have the skills to be able to coach and motivate their staff."

For highly respected "Train the Trainer" courses, designed to help managers deliver first class training to their staff, and the unique free consultancy afforded by a conversation with one of the Stonebow team, contact:

Sharon.glancy@stonebow.co.uk or visit: www.stonebow.co.uk for more information on Stonebow courses and training.

Western Price Alert

Experts have warned that overpricing in the lead up to the London Olympic Games could have a lasting and damaging effect on hospitality and tourism businesses.

At a Hotel Marketing Association event at the Chesterfield Hotel in London's Mayfair, industry leaders warned of the danger that some hotels may take the short term step of inflating prices - which will not help our international perception or increase the volume of visitors.

David Clarke, chief executive of Best Western Hotels, said: "Destiny is in our hands and I hope we do deliver the service people expect of the capital. I hope the charges to stay in London are not inflated because of the Olympics."

"We've done a good job making commitments at the British Hospitality Association but prices will have to be policed, the government really has no idea of the effect this could have."

Sector businesses have had a wonderful decade with growing disposable income, low interest rates, high consumer appetites and readily available capital, but it is clear that the effects of rising energy and food prices and the credit crunch are now being felt.

This was reflected in the findings of our latest quarterly Employer Panel Survey - two-thirds of respondents found that they

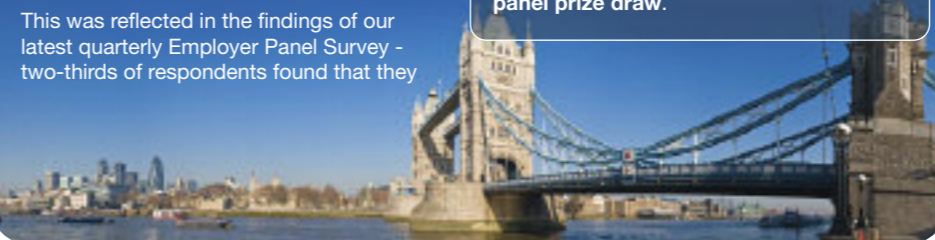
had already experienced some effects of the credit crunch, and a massive 90 percent believed that their business will be affected in the future.

Every respondent had suffered with rising running costs, and there were mixed opinions on how to deal with this. Although raising sales prices is one way of making up the difference, in the current climate where people have less disposable income, there are fears that this will further drive away customers.

Either way, it is clear that a rise in prices, although perhaps ideal for short term gain, could have a long term detrimental effect on industry, and businesses should take this into consideration when looking at raising their sales prices for profit.

We want your views and are looking for even more employers to take part in our quarterly panel surveys. Results of previous surveys and information on how you can give us your views can be accessed at www.people1st.co.uk/employerpanel.

Everyone who adds their voice to the debate will be entered into our employer panel prize draw.



Closure Not Always Bad News

Employees at the Four Seasons Park Lane Hotel are facing the prospect of redundancy ahead of a planned 18-month closure for refurbishment in September - is it possible to keep hotel staff on during long periods of closure?

The five-star hotel is currently in a 90-day consultation with its employees, and has invited 52 hotel and hospitality companies to a jobs fair to find alternate employment for staff - following in the footsteps of the Savoy Hotel, which closed for a 16-month refurbishment last year. The Savoy found alternative work for 97% of its 500 employees after deciding that they could not afford to keep them on the payroll. This would suggest that refurbishment periods almost certainly mean a change in employer for hotel staff.

However, there are organisations that have chosen to continue investing in their staff with a long-term vision in mind. Andy Lee, general manager of The Connaught Hotel in Mayfair, bucked the trend by keeping his staff on full pay throughout their seven-month restoration period last year.

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Speaking at the time, he said:

"Staff at the Connaught have a unique relationship with our guests. The team has bonded over many years, creating an exceptional atmosphere and a level of service that has attracted one of the world's highest percentages of repeat guests at CEO level.

"We have relocated our staff to our sister hotels - Claridges and the Berkeley - where they have been warmly welcomed, and some have also been transferred to our head office at Maybourne.

"This industry needs to set examples to its future employees - prospective workers observing a company that goes to such lengths to secure its valuable human assets for the future may well wish to join an organisation with such an open mind."

More Thumbs-Up for Diplomas

The university admissions service says that more than 100 higher education institutions have now provided statements backing the new Diplomas.

People 1st is currently developing two of the 17 new diploma lines, with the Diploma in Hospitality due to be available to pupils from September 2009, and the Diploma in Travel and Tourism due to follow in 2010. This provides a great opportunity for talented young people who may be undecided about their future career plans to explore our sector.

UCAS chief executive Anthony McClaran said:

"It is very encouraging that a wide cross-section of universities and colleges have positively indicated that they view the Advanced Diplomas as a suitable entry route into higher education.

"These statements go a long way to placing the Advanced Diplomas firmly in the spectrum of qualifications that universities consider to provide the breadth of skills and knowledge that students will need to be successful at the higher education level."

Travel and Tourism Employers - We Want Your Views

The success of the bid for the National Skills Academy has been great news for the Hospitality Industry, but the government is still looking for sectors to develop National Skills Academies.

Are you an employer in the Travel and Tourism industry? Do you feel that Travel and Tourism businesses would benefit from developing a gold standard in training? Would you support a bid for a National Skills Academy for Travel and Tourism? If so, please email marketingteam@people1st.co.uk



The Last Word

People 1st is buzzing this month. It's not the fact that Simon Tarr, our finance director is a Manchester United fan. The big issue again this month is China. We said goodbye to our Chinese intern this month and with her seat still warm, Stephan John; our head of vocational learning, is schmoozing the Dalai Lama.

And in a series of coincidences, the charismatic monk checked into the prestigious Park Lane Hilton Hotel taking over the 20th floor at the same time that Lord Coe and London Mayor Boris Johnson were meeting in the same hotel.

Which brings us neatly to the theme of customer service. On the day that the Dalai Lama, the Olympics chief, the London Mayor and the world's media descended on the Hilton, the unflappable GM Michael Shepperd still had time to stop for natter with yours truly and Caterer and Hotelkeeper editor Mark Lewis.

Despite all the flurry down in the lobby, Michael still took time to work the room in the restaurant and say hello to his guests.

And at a time when the perception of our welcome is low, it's pleasing to see American and Russian tourists purring with pleasure as the charming host made small talk and effused English style and grace.

With the holiday season fast approaching, we would welcome story ideas and topics that you'd like us to cover. Make sure you contact us at marketingteam@people1st.co.uk.

The Editor



Named Chefs – Are They Essential to Success?



Simon Lazarus

We posed this question to Simon Lazarus, Director of Food and Beverage for Hilton UK and Ireland, who offered his opinion on what is most important to the success of a hotel restaurant:

“Historically, hotel restaurants have been destinations in their own right and the reputation of chefs played a

large part in where people would choose to dine.

Since then the celebrity of chefs has been catapulted thanks to the media and a growing fascination with the world of food. The result was a growth in chefs taking on their own restaurants and a chef landscape peppered with household names like Gordon Ramsay, Jamie Oliver and Rick Stein.

Galvin at Windows at the London Hilton on Park Lane is one of London's most acclaimed restaurants and something we are very proud of. However, we have 77 hotels in the UK and Ireland where the restaurant chefs are not necessarily well known, but are still successful and offer superb customer experiences.

When devising new restaurant concepts, the key is individuality, combined with a consistency of quality in both service and the product. Menus should be seasonal and influenced by the chef – our restaurants will regularly change the menu at least every season, if not on a daily or weekly basis.

Separating the restaurant from the hotel is important, including its own entrance. A strong brand is a powerful tool and, whether you're using the name of a chef or not, getting it right is highly important. We ensure our restaurants benefit from Hilton's knowledge and

experience with their own brands.

Several new restaurants have been launched recently in our UK & Ireland hotels, each with their own brand and personality. The Larder at Hilton London Tower Bridge is an entirely unique concept, which complements the hotel's stylish design serving fresh, seasonal dishes in a discerning atmosphere.

In most cases, the busiest time for hotel restaurants will be the breakfast service and while we used to brief design teams to create a breakfast area which can cater for lunch and dinner, it is now very much the other way around.

Getting the basics right – quality, consistency, atmosphere and uniqueness – will ensure that a restaurant has every chance to be a success, whether it has a celebrity chef behind it or not..“

SHOUT ABOUT IT

Get in touch and let us know what you're thinking. Whether it's a burning hospitality issue you want to highlight or you just fancy a rant, let us know. We can't hear you from behind your desk so get typing or get **dialling...**

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