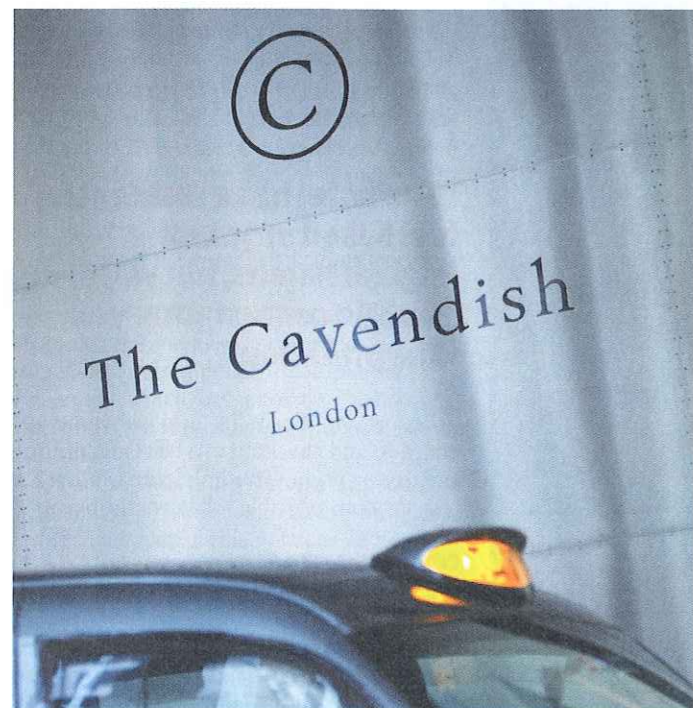


PEOPLE POWER

Having been recognised as one of the best small companies to work for in hospitality, the Cavendish hotel in London has set the standard for operational excellence. Managing director Ciaran Fahy (right) tells *Janet Harmer* how the hotel creates a positive people culture



You need great people to transform your service delivery

On arriving at the Cavendish hotel I wanted to create the best four-star property in London, and to achieve that I needed to make sure I had a great team in place. The starting point was a service training programme called Shine, which was all about inspiring the staff to install measures to create the best four-star hotel. Within two years we achieved Hospitality Assured accreditation from the Institute of Hospitality.

In-room questionnaires are a great means of assessing and improving service performance

We look for 90% guest satisfaction on 20 key areas of service delivery. If we don't achieve this score, we are understanding – but not for long. We use the questionnaires as a means of making improvements. We also use mystery guest stays in the same way.

Keep your management structure flat and meetings to a minimum

My management style is action-orientated. If

I'm holding a meeting about finance, then it just involves me and the financial controller. The nitty gritty of the issue is discussed and actions are put in place.

Benchmark yourself against businesses outside the hospitality industry

We knew we were doing well within hospitality but wanted to stretch ourselves against the best in other industries. This is why we applied for the *Sunday Times* Best Companies To Work For list and achieved 99th position in 2009, rising to 35th in 2011 in the Small Companies category.

Giving something back will help improve team spirit

Focusing on our corporate and social responsibility last year helped improve our rating on the *Sunday Times* Best Places To Work list. We increased the number of hours we devoted to the local community, the amount of money we raised for charities and staff-led initiatives. We ended up having six charity events, led by the

staff, including a parachute jump by the concierge, Richard Jenkins, who raised £3,000. It has been a fantastic way to increase team bonding.

Be exact about your staff requirements for training and development

So much training is too broad. Focus training and development needs for each individual and the business needs of your hotel. Out of 150 staff at the Cavendish, about 30 have an interest to move to the next level and are supported in their career aspirations. For everyone else, the focus is on their craft training skills.

Don't allow your success in awards to lead to complacency

Now we've got into the *Sunday Times* Best Companies To Work For list, the pressure is to stay there. We can't take our foot off the pedal now – in fact, we've got to apply it even harder to further improve our position. You should learn from the award process, build your strategy and gain confidence to do better.



WHO I ADMIRE: ALAN PARKER

Alan Parker, the former chief executive of Whitbread, was enormously influential on me when the company held the franchise for Marriott hotels in the UK. He invested hugely in all his general managers' development and always took a personal interest in how the business was progressing. He took the time to have a drink or a meal with you to understand how things were going.

Parker always had a clear vision, gave his team the resources to be the best and set an outstanding example of commercial leadership for everyone. When he launched the Spirit To Serve programme, he sent his own senior team and all the hotel executive teams to Ashridge for a week's training to deliver the programme in the hotels – a huge investment in time and

money, as there were more than 50 hotels.

When the hotels completed the training Parker personally visited every hotel from Aberdeen to Portsmouth to congratulate and tell us how the Vision for Marriott in the UK was progressing. True hospitality leadership requires leaders like him to make the time and put in the personal effort to truly inspire and engage people.

Run an internal awards scheme to show appreciation and recognition

It encourages staff to go on to bigger and better things. Doing well creates a sense of pride and team spirit in the workplace. Winning awards gives confidence and a sense of belief.

Concentrate on the positives

Encourage staff. Support and praise them. Recognise that occasionally things go wrong – everyone is entitled to an off day. If the overall culture is positive, there is less chance of negative staff issues. I can't

remember the last time we had a staff grievance.

Empowering staff creates a positive team spirit

The front office manager recently organised new staff uniforms and, by involving relevant members of staff, it really lifted everybody. There was no need for me to get involved apart from agreeing the costs – it would have been a waste of management time.

A soft refurbishment of some of our bedrooms was co-ordinated by the house manager together with a group of staff from the house-keeping, front office and sales departments. Traditionally, this is something which could have been handled by senior managers, but the result was far better for being carried out by the people who really knew what mattered.

Build in informal time to talk to staff

I sit down with groups of staff for lunch once a month. There is no agenda; it is just an opportunity to find out what the staff are up to.