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Hotels Train in English, Manners, Motivation

By Rachel Nielsen

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Holiday Inn Suschevsky waiting for employees and guests in the early morning. The hotel's staffers begin every workday with a 15-minute training session.

Konstantin Goryainov runs not one but two hotels in Moscow, Holiday Inn Lesnaya and Holiday Inn Suschevsky. After becoming the Lesnaya's general manager in July 2010, he was promoted to senior general manager of both hotels earlier this year. He now is in charge of 600 hotel rooms, two restaurants and substantial conference space. Goryainov is a fluent English speaker with a long background in the hotel business.

Earlier this month, he went for training.

That his hotel sent its top director for training — albeit at a global meeting for general managers in InterContinental Hotels Group — underlines the importance that hotel companies place on proper skills and good management. From personal grooming to hotel promotion to English proficiency, the skills required for hotel employees in the capital are

many and exacting. The importance and the scale of hotel employee training in Moscow will only increase in the next few years, as international hotel companies open more properties here and hire thousands more employees.

InterContinental, which owns the Holiday Inn brand, held the IHG Way for General Managers from Nov. 14 to Nov. 17 in Istanbul. Goryainov in fact was required to attend the event as part of his first-year training as a general manager, or hotel director.

Hotel directors from properties run under the IHG brand attend annual conferences, Goryainov said, so that they can interact with directors from other hotels, swap problems and advice, and hear about the overall hotel market.

Hitting the Ground Running

Training for staff employees is no less serious a matter, whether at Holiday Inn hotels or other brands. At the five-star Lotte Hotel Moscow, which opened its doors in 2010, all new employees attend three days of orientation at which they learn Lotte's way of handling hotel guests, maintaining one's appearance according to Lotte standards and discussing and promoting the hotel's features with guests, said Lilia Bekmukhametova, human resources director for the South Korean-brand hotel.

Next step for fresh hires: They go through 14 days of on-the-job training, in which they learn about the department that they will be working in.

In addition, hires at Lotte Hotel Moscow can get language help, if they need it. All of the hotel's managers are fluent English speakers, Bekmukhametova said, as are the front office staff, the telephone operators and the front-desk receptionists. Waiters, porters and other staff typically studied some English in school, and they are taught "the necessary phrases," she said.

For those who want to improve their skills in English — the language common to almost all guests at Moscow's business hotels — Lotte offers voluntary lessons that staff members can take during the workday for three to six months.

Holiday Inn Lesnaya and Holiday Inn Suschevsky also demand English proficiency from their frontline staffers, and they offer classes for those staff members who held jobs that don't require English — but who want to move up to jobs that do. Its classes, too, are voluntary and held in-house.

Finding managers who speak the business world's lingua franca isn't easy, Goryainov said in a telephone interview.

"Moscow hotels face quite a difficulty when we talk about English-speaking persons," he said in an interview this week. Compared to the Soviet and immediate post-Soviet period, there are now lots of job opportunities and attractive salary packages for Russians who speak English.

"Foreign languages really become an issue for us," Goryainov said. "We have to give priority to those candidates who speak foreign languages," and English in particular, he added.

The Hotel Baltschug Kempinski, a five-star hotel that sits across the Moscow River from the

Kremlin, has similar language requirements for its front office, sales, marketing and food and beverage departments.

“The majority of Kempinski employees already know the English language on a very good level,” said Zlata Nikolayeva, training manager for the Hotel Baltschug Kempinski. To bring the rest of its employees up to the mark, the hotel runs free classes available to all employees.

Language learning is an incentive for employees at four- and five-star hotels. “English classes are always very popular in our hotel,” Nikolayeva said. “Employees happily attend them even in their non-working time and days off,” she said by e-mail.

Retain Staff, Maintain Quality

Employee growth is part of a factor in Moscow’s hotel world that is gaining importance as more elite and luxury hotels open in the capital: retention. For high-end hotels, keeping highly trained employees who have received hundreds of hours of training and who know the hotel’s service standards is a major part of maintaining their quality.

Bekmukhametova said “a proper corporate culture” is one of her hotel’s keys to retaining employees. That kind of culture happens “when a person feels that he is part of the process at his job,” she explained by phone.

Motivating employees is also key, she said, and Lotte does so with bonus pay, free meals and reduced-price stays at Lotte Hotels that employees can receive as rewards for their hard work.

Employee development is also critical, she said. “We give them the opportunity to build a career,” the Lotte human resources chief said of her staff.

“If they’re not motivated, money and [benefit] packages can do nothing,” Goryainov said. What’s critical for retaining employees, he said, is letting employees know “why, how and where they can move forward in the nearest future,” he said.

“Development and maintenance are more based on motivation,” he added during the interview.

Of course, good training starts with good people. Executives with some international hotel brands told The Moscow Times that they prefer to avoid hiring people who were Soviet-era hotel employees. But others said they have no qualms about past jobs in Soviet hotels, as long as the person has a service mindset.

“I have no problem with that,” Goryainov replied when he was asked for his opinions on hiring people who were staff in hotels in the Soviet Union. He added, “If the atmosphere and the philosophy of the hotel are strong, then the person can be taught and motivated.” He also emphasized the person’s own interest in learning and serving guests.

Nikolayeva at the Baltschug said that, at her hotel, “normally we are looking not at the age but at the personality.” She said her five-star hotel had “a lot of young employees who combine their work with their studies, as well as employees above 40.”

“If the person is friendly, motivated, dynamic, communicative, ready to help the guest, this is our candidate,” she added.

Major Hotel Openings in the Moscow Area

Launch	Hotel	Company	Stars	Number of rooms	Located
Q1 2011	Crowne Plaza Club *	InterContinental Hotels Group	4	149	Krasnopresnenskaya Naberezhnaya
Q1 2011	Ramada Moscow Domodedovo	Wyndham Worldwide	4	134	Ulitsa Ilyushina (Moscow region)
Q2 2011	Radisson Blu Belorusskaya	Rezidor Hotel Group	4	264	3rd Ulitsa Yamskogo Polya
Q2 2011	Aminevskaya	Mospromstroi	3	223	Aminyevskoye Shosse
Q4 2011	Courtyard by Marriott Paveletskaya	Marriott	4	171	Kozhevnicheskaya Ulitsa
Q4 2011	Azimut Hotel Moscow	Azimut	3	134	Danilovskaya Manufaktura
Q4 2011	InterContinental Moscow	InterContinental Hotels Group	5	205	Tverskaya Ulitsa
Q1 2012	Mercure Arbat Moscow	Accor	3-4	109	Smolenskaya Ploshchad

** Part of Crowne Plaza Moscow World Trade Center, which has 575 rooms in addition to the Club rooms.*
Sources: Knight Frank Russia, CB Richard Ellis, Jones Lang LaSalle, media reports
— Rachel Nielsen and Vladimir Tyurin

This article is part of a business report on Russian hotels. Read about the emergence of budget and mid-market hotels in the other part *of the report.*

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