



Malmaison

hotels that dare to be different

Hotel du Vin
&
Bistro



Sean Wheeler

Ellie Rich meets Sean Wheeler,

Group Director of People Development for Malmaison & Hotel Du Vin.

In my role as an Executive Search Consultant I work with business leaders who often ask me what other organisations are currently doing within their HR functions. With this in mind I am conducting a series of interviews with leading HR professionals in order to share information within the industry.

Described to me by one of his former colleagues as 'one of the good guys', I recently met Sean Wheeler, Group Director of People Development for Malmaison and Hotel Du Vin. Part of the senior team, he has been integral to the growth of the business, taking it from 11 sites when he joined in 2005 to 27 sites across the UK, with 2100 employees and a lean HR team of seven. He always tries to put the customer first in all his activities and has a passion for development.

Malmaison are one of Europe's leading hotel brands with a reputation for being at the cutting edge of hospitality today. Hotel Du Vin have a quintessential British style; elegant and unpretentious with an unquestionable devotion to wine. Both are owned by MWB Group Holdings Plc.

What are the current business priorities?

Along with many other organisations this year, our main focus is on protecting the bottom line. We are closely reviewing our costs, without impacting on the guest experience which is fundamental. We have taken a business decision to avoid redundancies, instead looking at job enlargement as people leave. We have taken a more creative approach to looking for sales with greater flexibility on our corporate rates and a focus on our food and beverage offering.

We have done more training and development than ever before, focusing on standards and product knowledge and have found this a valuable way of increasing engagement and productivity.

What is the vision for the future?

We want to continue to give our guests great value and service, and also will be investing more money back into our existing hotels. We will have more Hotel Du Vin openings in the UK particularly in the North. We have trialled a 'Pub Du Vin' concept in Brighton focusing on great ales as well as wines and pub food. We plan to roll this out across other UK locations. In the long-term, we plan to grow the Malmaison brand internationally and have just hired a new CFO from Whitbread who was integral to the growth of Premier Inn internationally.

What is the biggest barrier to success?

At the moment, funding. Unsurprisingly, there is not much money out there and the Private Equity market has dwindled. But we are committed to continued growth when the time is right.

What are the current people priorities?

We have a list of key priorities which underpin everything we do, including nurturing our culture, continuing to grow talent from within, and ensuring our values are alive. Our values are all about giving the best possible service and experience to our guests.

Our Values

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Take responsibility | Prepare for service |
| Know your subject | Communicate with each other |
| Be enthusiastic | Enjoy yourself |
| Look immaculate | Be yourself |
| Be positive | |

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How do you demonstrate the return on investment in HR?

We measure key metrics including retention and internal progression, along with vital activities which keep us legal, such as Eligibility to Work and Health & Safety. However, in the main, our focus is on sales and service. We have a deliberately lean HR function and our aim is to engage our people to drive the business forward.

How would your Board colleagues describe you?

They would say I am always fighting to make sure people are on the agenda and that I drive a team led culture. Our CEO is a strong supporter of the people agenda and we believe that if we look after our employees, they will look after the guests, which in turn will lead to increased profit.

What do you look for when you are recruiting?

I really believe in Jack Welsh's '4 Es' and follow them as a guide. Jack ran GE for over 20 years and is a real inspiration.

Jack Welsh's '4 E's'

Energy: Individuals with energy love to 'go, go, go'. These people possess boundless energy and get up every day ready to attack the job at hand. High energy people move at 95 miles-per-hour in a 55 mile-per-hour world.

Energisers: Know how to spark others to perform. They outline a vision and get people to carry it out. Energisers know how to get people excited about a cause or a crusade. They are selfless in giving others the credit when things go right, but quick to accept responsibility when things go awry.

Edge: Those with edge are competitive types. They know how to make the really difficult decisions, such as hiring, firing and promoting, never allowing the degree of difficulty to stand in their way.

Execute: The key to the entire model. Without measurable results, the other 'E's' are of little use. Executors recognise that activity and productivity are not the same and are capable of converting energy and edge into action and results.

Source: Jeffery A. Frames Author of Jack Welch and the 4 E's of Leadership.

What advice would you give to someone starting their career in HR?

Work closely with operations. The best HR people understand the business and have a relationship with operations. Don't be office based - get out there and add value. Integrate with and support the front end.

Who has been a role model to you?

Tony Hughes who used to be the MD of TGI Fridays and the Restaurant Group within Mitchells & Butlers. He is very inspirational. I got a lot of my values from him, particularly around motivating the team and giving excellent customer service. He understands the value of development.

What has been your greatest achievement so far?

Putting a strong people culture into the company and getting external recognition for it. I am very proud of the awards we have won including the 'Best place to work in hospitality' from the Caterer Magazine and the CIPD award for 'Best talent management for business benefit'.

What motto do you live by?

Choose your attitude. I have it set on my phone so whenever I turn it on I get a reminder. I also live by Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. I was a Covey coach for over 20 years and this underpins my way of working every day.

Career Summary

2005 - present Hotel Du Vin and Malmaison - Group Director of People Development

1996 - 2005 Bass becoming Mitchells & Butlers - Group HR Manager for Restaurant Group

1988 - 1996 TGI Fridays - Manager in Training, Site Openings, Head of Openings (UK), General Manager, Head of Training, Head of Operations (London & M25)

1985 - 1988 Miss Selfridge - Catering Manager

1983 - 1985 Country Club Hotels - Management Training Scheme progressing to Assistant Front of House Manager



Contact

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