



Food and Beverage Department

Management Development Needs Assessment

When the Spirit Mountain Casino (SMC) Food and Beverage Department hired me, I invested the first three months of my tenure in questioning, listening, observing, modeling, and proposing new language to frame how to work differently within the division. This needs assessment is a synthesis of what I discovered during this three-month discovery process.

Problem/Opportunity Statement

Define the intervention necessary to transform the SMC Food and Beverage department management into a management team focused on the delivery of hospitality to SMC guests through an empowered and motivated front line team.

Project Focus and Background

The Food and Beverage department is the largest department at SMC. In all we have close to 400 team members working to support the delivery of services 24/7 in eight different “restaurants” and two major kitchens. This team supports the Legends Restaurant, which also delivers banquet services in four banquet rooms, The Summit View Restaurant and Bar, The Buffet, The Deli, The Employee Dining Room, The Casino Floor, and the Outlets, which include three small express food restaurants. The Food and Beverage department has a reputation for the delivery of quality food services at a reasonable price. An excellent service to support SMC.

SMC has built its business on the delivery of hospitality to guests, the best in the region. The delivery of hospitality is at the core of the mission, vision, and values of the organization. The delivery of hospitality is also showing signs of tarnish as the organization matures and the market changes. I have focused on how to rekindle the fun and passion of our front line team, those who deliver hospitality to our guests.

The reaction of many is to fix the front line team. Train them how to deliver hospitality. Train them what hospitality is. If we keep telling them what to do and how to do it, they will of course do it. This is contrary to my experience. My experience over the last 25 years of helping organizations deliver high levels of service to customers has taught me that the behavior of the front line team is in great part a reflection of the atmosphere within which they must work. And the management for which they work creates that atmosphere. Therefore, during the first stage of this process, I chose the focus of transforming the way management managed, not teaching the front line team how to do their jobs.

Once management is providing the type of support and atmosphere that will create a highly motivated front line team, adding interventions designed to expand the performance of the front line team will be useful. That will be the focus of my work at the next stage of development.

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this project is to quickly assess the state of the division so that I can design an intervention that will move our management toward the professionalism necessary to develop and nurture the front line team insuring the delivery of high levels of hospitality.

Importance of the Project

The market within which SMC is operating is dynamic and uncertain. Internal management changes, political, social, financial, and world changes have created stress and uncertainty for everyone from the director level down to the front line staff. Given this climate, focusing on the delivery of hospitality is critical. This is the one constant. SMC must keep its customers coming back regardless of the dynamics of the world around us. We must charge our management team with the delivery of the highest levels of hospitality possible. And that can only be done through our front line team. Therefore the importance of this project is critical. We must reenergize the front line team through the execution of our management.

Research Methodology

Conversations with diverse groups of team members through out SMC have been the foundation of this needs assessment. Combined with observations of management and front line team members, this has provided me with a 360-degree look at the organization and its ability to deliver hospitality to our guests.

I added market research in the form of conversations with other OD professionals from other Native American Gaming organizations and articles from specific Native American Gaming publications to support my internal research.

Current Processes

Management practices in the Food and Beverage department have been primarily task driven. Management is told what to do and they in turn tell front line team members what to do. There is a pervasive atmosphere of finding team members doing tasks incorrectly and correcting the team member. Team members tend to be treated as drones without the intelligence to participate in the decisions needed to deliver high quality hospitality. Managers tend to be treated the same way so it is no surprise that they treat their teams that way. Most of the management behaviors fall into what has been characterized as bossing.

Research Steps and Results

When I joined the Food and Beverage team, we were in the process of an intensive operational audit and there was a tremendous amount of fear and trepidation. This atmosphere still exists and may even be worse. To start my research, my first step was to participate in the different operating units within the departments and the various meetings each shift and operating unit held. I added to this a meeting with other OD professionals in our field and several articles that pointed to the same issues I was to uncover in my research.

1. During my conversations with managers, front line team members, and others in SMC, I used a variety of strategies to gain insights into the issues within the department.
 - I used hypothetical questions to explore what if we were to practice our management differently.
 - I injected new language around the use of conversation into my interactions to gauge the receptivity of moving from a bossing paradigm to a participatory paradigm.
 - I asked a variety of open-ended questions to help me discover what was happening and what the practices were.
 - I observed practices during all facets of the interactions and related these practices with the insights gained from the conversations in which I had been participating.
2. I participated in a symposium on Native American Gaming orientations. During that symposium, I met and was able to interact with OD professionals from 8 different Native American Gaming organizations. During these conversations I was able to learn much about experiences others were having leading to many of the same concerns I had uncovered.
 - I participated in group discussions where all participants were able to explore issues that were similar.
 - I was able to ask questions of the participants regarding middle management performance.
 - I was able to ask the facilitators who worked with Native American Gaming organizations across the nation what their observations were regarding middle management within the industry.
3. From my extensive reading, I selected as reference two different articles and a report on the highlights from the 2002 National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) conference that addressed the concern over poor performance in middle management in Native American Gaming organizations.
 - In section one page 3 of the NIGA CFO Roundtables from the 2002 conference, employee training programs were addressed. In the report they stated that strategic focus on Middle Management Training resulted in reduction on overall training costs by nearly 60%.
 - Middle management usually is pulled up from ranks
 - Middle management may lack supervisory experience
 - Middle management needed training in supervising employees who were previously peers
 - Middle management training costs tracked separately via Human Resource functions
 - In the December 2002 issue of Native American Casino, the article *How Do You Get To Good Guest Service?* suggests that to get good guest service you must start with middle management. “The top priority for training is getting the middle managers on board with specific behaviors that reinforce good service and create a positive environment”.
 - In the December 2002 issue of Indian Gaming, the article *It’s About Recognition* addresses the same issue. While discussing why employees ask for union representation, they state “In a fear-based environment, employees go into a self-

- protective mode and quite communicating...It is up to management leadership to provide positive resources to its officers, managers, and supervisors. These resources should include management and supervisory training in labor law, labor relations, employment law and communications”.
4. I observed several internal training's provided to our team and others to gauge the fit of these interventions for the issues that I observed in the Food and Beverage department.

Synopses of Findings

After the extensive research in which I participated during a my initial tenure in the Food and Beverage department at SMC, I concluded:

- ◆ My initial focus needed to be on the transformation of the way the department managed; moving it from a bossing paradigm to a coaching paradigm. This initial focus was not intended to exclude front line team member training, but the up front work was certainly to be focused on management transformation.
- ◆ Communication in the department was particularly poor. People did not talk together. We had a raft of memos, directives, e-mails, and notices. Conversations to build understanding and gain insights simply did not occur. Lack of trust and miscommunication was the norm, not only between team members but also between each layer of team members within the department. I needed to focus on creating conversations within the department, at all levels and at all times.
- ◆ Expectations and standards were unclear at best and non-existent at worst. Everyone seemed to do something differently and there were few performance standards that would help drive high level performance.
- ◆ Alignment of job descriptions, performance reviews, coaching, training, hiring, and employee development did not exist. We hired people who would or could not deliver the hospitality we expected, we did not coach to clear standards, and we did not review team members based on the same standards. We needed to start the process by involving team members in defining their own professional attributes.
- ◆ Training for managers was sporadic. They were sent to classes every once in a while. There was no consistent development program. The closest thing to a development program was SMU, a 9-month leadership development program. However I found that management team members who went through the program felt it was a waist of time. My own assessment was that the program was too basic for all but the most green of management. There was not a development program for high performing management practices.
- ◆ There was no forum for managers to get together and talk about how to do their jobs better. We were asking them to learn to coach but where could they talk about what was working and what was not. There was no forum for these conversations.

Recommendations

This is a complex set of issues and one that can not simply be solved with a magic bullet so to speak. Here is a complex set of pieces to the puzzle that we are implementing to help in this transformation.

- ◆ The first piece of the puzzle to implement is “Conversation Circles”. This venue is designed to bring supervisors together on a regular basis to talk about supervision, how to do it excellently, discover what others are doing that is successful, and to learn together how to build a powerful, motivated, and effective team. There are 3 sessions per week timed to allow people from different shifts to attend. These sessions are open to supervisors from any department in the Casino or Tribe. They will be richer and create more learning and help transform behaviors more quickly the more people that attend and the more often they attend. This format does not replace classroom training, it is designed to help people own and implement what they may have heard in a classroom. This is the context for the internship.
- ◆ The second initiative is “Lightning Bolts”, a program to encourage supervisors and leads to start looking for people doing things right on a daily basis. The Lightning Bolt program is designed to work hand and hand with the “Conversation Circles”. Supervisors and leads were not used to looking for people doing good work and rewarding the efforts, they were used to looking for this to correct in team members. Again the behaviors demoralized the team and made them feel unappreciated. This program will help management focus on rewarding what is working well, rather than pay attention only to those things that are not working well. If we can get all of our team focused on doing good work and work that delivers our mission, vision, and values, we will have made substantial gains towards improving department performance. What the supervisors learn in the “Conversation Circles” is practiced while implementing “Lightning Bolts”.
- ◆ I will actively coach and work with supervisors and leads to help them understand what we are doing. Our F&B manager Glen, our Administration Supervisor Trina, and our F&B Assistant Manager Lyle are creating the same coaching sessions based on the same paradigm. We will not simply send out memos and directives, we will hold conversations all over the department personally talking with team members and helping them move forward. We will model what we expect them to be doing and strongly ask that they work into this effective communication pattern quickly. The coaching will also directly be designed to model what we want and to support the development of the attributes we expect in our management team. This works hand and hand with the other initiatives we are implementing.
- ◆ During all of my conversations with team members, I will be focusing on conversation. Why? If people are not talking together, they will not solve problems and they will destroy working relationships and the delivery of hospitality. Glen will strongly focus on getting people to talk and begin to build trust and relationships. Learning to talk together is critical and a key attribute for an effective supervisor. This conversation highly supports the development of the management team.
- ◆ We will set standards that we expect people to work to and will integrate those standards into our conversations. When we coach a supervisor, we will ask her/him to ask her/his team how they would cover the floor if we have call outs and clearly state the standard of service we expect. They participate in the decision and we have better decisions and motivated team members. And yes, these are not well-substantiated standards as of yet, however I have asked Chemeketa to explore doing a research project with students to help

us define our standards. If they are uninterested, I will go to the OSU MBA program and the PSU MBA programs and see if we can get a project initiated. The key is to set high standards and communicate what they are and manage to them. We will work to get these standards set. This is part of good supervision and we are supporting this direction through the “Conversation Circles” and our ongoing conversations with our management team.

- ◆ We will work with the supervisor, lead, and buddy teams to define professional attributes. We will take this work and build new job descriptions based on the attributes they defined. From that we will be building performance appraisals that reflect the professional attributes that have been defined. Coaching will be inline with these same attributes as will be employee development. The intent is to align expectations, appraisal, coaching, employee development, and rewards to the same set of standards. This too is designed to support the development of professional attributes in the management team. HR has agreed to work with us on the pilot program for the Casino based on this work.
- ◆ We will not be accepting excuses any more. Glen had made a strong stance on removing team members who are unwilling or unable to move in the direction we expect. Our willingness to make these decisions has already started to rebuild trust in our team. Our actions are watched and if not inline with our words, we will have no integrity and no trust and morale in the team will fail. This work also supports the development of our operational performance and a professional team.
- ◆ We will continue to send management team members to targeted training’s to help infuse knowledge and to help shift perceptions. We have however, seen little movement based on sending people out to training’s and we can only hope that we can bring much of this work inside so that we can build supportive curriculum to support the direction we want to go. I believe that we can work with Laurie to make this happen.
- ◆ I am in conversation with our Training Manager Laurie about development of a supervisor development program. The intent is to have a potential supervisor complete the program before being considered for promotion. In this way, we will not promote someone into management that is unprepared. I envision a four-month program with curriculum designed to prepare them to be successful in the position. At the end of the program, we will have a thumbs up or down and whether we will move them into the position. The intent is to provide professional training to prepare people for success. Once the program is developed, we will move the existing management team through the program to establish a foundation for what a professional in the department must be able to do and to know.
- ◆ We are holding a two-day seminar on Nov 25 and 26, which is a preview seminar for work that the Native American Leadership Academy offers. This is not simply an overview, but a session with strong support of the work we are now doing. The implementation of this intervention is designed to give our leaders a strong boost of positive work and concepts to help speed up the transition we are implementing. The intended outcomes include building team work and a strong team dedicated to the changes we are implementing, infusing knowledge and supporting and confirming existing knowledge, creating enthusiasm and energy, and last but not least, supporting from an

industry perspective what we are doing to build a high performing team and operation. Through the process we will also preview the work of the NALA for quality and fit to see if they might be a resource to help our organization excel as we move ahead. Another way to state the intent is that I want a critical mass of energy and focus on this transformation so that it does not lose steam. Our continued support and conversations around all of these issues will be critical to also support where we are going.

- ◆ We have on the schedule to develop our “Lightning Strikes” training program. This is a series of 10-minute experiential training’s to be delivered at all shift changes. The purpose is to create fun conversations around key questions that matter to the success of the organization. All teams within F&B will participate in the same question during the week to generate conversation and ideas around that question. We will do this every other week, which will keep the conversations alive around important questions.

Expected investment for Intervention

There is little to no investment in the implementation of this intervention. When we bring in the Native American Leadership Academy, we will invest about \$2,000 but that is the only investment expected.

Implementation Strategy

The first step is the initiation of the conversation circles. Mentoring, coaching, modeling, and ongoing conversations are to be implemented immediately to support the conversation circles and provide a forum for management to explore what they are hearing and learning. During this process, I will be developing the management development program. I expect to have this developed and implemented next year. The pieces to the transformation puzzle and how they work together are presented above in the recommendation section above.