

Taking the heat

How do you convince highly competent individuals, working in different parts of Europe, of the benefits of working together as a lean and efficient management team? That was the challenge for contact centre technology provider Aspect. And Festo Didactic's solution? Consign them to 'Hell's Kitchen'...



Business success – and survival – today depends on getting the very best out of every individual. Outstanding individual performance is no longer enough: companies need to exploit the synergy between talented individuals, to reap the full operational benefits.

Aspect provides software and consulting services that turn the potential of unified communications into real business results in the contact centre.

Chris Farnath, Senior Director of the customer support team in Europe & Africa, had previously used Festo to help

develop his team building process, using personality profiling and teambuilding challenges. Earlier this year, he approached Festo again.

“We needed to create an effective management team across our locations in the UK and Germany. We have two senior and six middle managers in place, all strong and capable individuals, who are highly effective at managing their own operations – I was looking for a way of getting them to work as a coherent management team, to deliver greater operational efficiencies.”

Management time is precious, so he was looking for a two and a half-day workshop that would convince the managers of the benefits of working together. It was imperative that all the team members would be taken out of their professional comfort zones, and presented with a challenge where failure would have ‘real consequences’. As Chris Farnath explains, “We didn’t want anyone thinking ‘if I don’t do this or if I fail it doesn’t really matter’, so there could be no psychological hiding places for any of the managers – or myself!”

“Two minutes for ravioli!... I still find it incredible that they were prepared to put their reputations into the hands of novices on a team building exercise.”

Peter – team member



Perfect combination

Festo Senior Consultant Mark Hemming needed to come up with a perfect combination of memorable experience and serious learning opportunity, something that would capture the managers' imaginations and force them to rethink their traditional autonomous working patterns.

The exact nature of the challenge was kept secret from all the participants until the very last minute. So when they arrived at the South Lodge Hotel in rural West Sussex on the evening of Friday April 3, they really didn't know what to expect...

The five star South Lodge Hotel is part of the Exclusive group of hotels owned by the Pecorelli family, and one of the country's finest hotels and eating venues (if the name sounds familiar, that's because the hotel hosted the G20 Finance ministers conference). It has two restaurants, one of which – The Pass – seats diners right in the kitchen.

That's where at breakfast on Saturday they discovered the nature of their challenge: to be the chefs for the weekend. The full Hell's Kitchen experience, in fact, and in full view of the diners.

Hell's Kitchen, full on!

Now, a fairly typical menu for this restaurant includes dishes such as velouté of cep with lemon gnocchi and herb oil, and potato wrapped monkfish cheek with squid ink orzo, fennel mousse and cumin cream. No one in the Aspect team had any previous cooking experience - in fact it's doubtful whether one or two of them had ever seen the inside of their own kitchens! To add real consequences to the challenge they had to cook for 22 paying guests on Saturday evening and another 22 for Sunday lunchtime. This was for real – the reputation of the Head Chefs and the hotel were at stake. →

→ Saturday morning and afternoon were spent in intensive training from The Pass Head Chef Matt Gillan and his team. This included inductions and introductions, Health & Safety covering hygiene requirements, environmental orientation, basic knife and equipment skills, plus of course an introduction to the menus, ingredients and dishes that they would be preparing for diners that evening.

The challenge was now on, for the Aspect management team to work together to perform to the highest culinary standards.

Instant feedback

It's true to say that thanks to their attitude, focus and dedication, together with the knowledge and skills – and iron nerve! – of their mentor and tutor Matt, they excelled at the challenge. Not only

did they do it once, but they went on to repeat their achievements the following day when 22 more guests arrived for Sunday lunch.

One of the benefits of a challenge with real consequences is that there's instant feedback on what goes right, as well as wrong. Using the restaurant's imaginative 'Tipple Talk' customer experience evaluation tool, diners could simply walk over to the chefs and tell them what they thought of the food. Praise was universal – a hugely valuable reward for team members unused to first-hand customer feedback in their professional environment.

The outcome

So, the diners had a great meal – how did the team feel about the experience?

Chris Farnath is unequivocal in his praise: "The session achieved all the goals we defined in advance, and exceeded our expectations in ensuring that the team worked together with real consequence. From a personal point of view, this was probably the most challenging but valuable team exercise I have ever participated in during my working life.

Following our terrific weekend, I have observed a significant increase in Team awareness and collaboration. Not only have we achieved effective management engagement, but the banter has become significantly more culinary! Truly lasting memories and a tangible productivity increase – what more could I ask for?"



Building teams

Back at work after the course some of the Aspects team reflect on their experiences:

Paul: “I still refer back to the experience to remind myself that greatness is achieved with planning, team work and communication”.

Hüsni: “Instant feedback from real life customers, I will be taking these points forward and applying them to my team”.

Nigel: “In the heat of the kitchen good communication and timing is everything”.

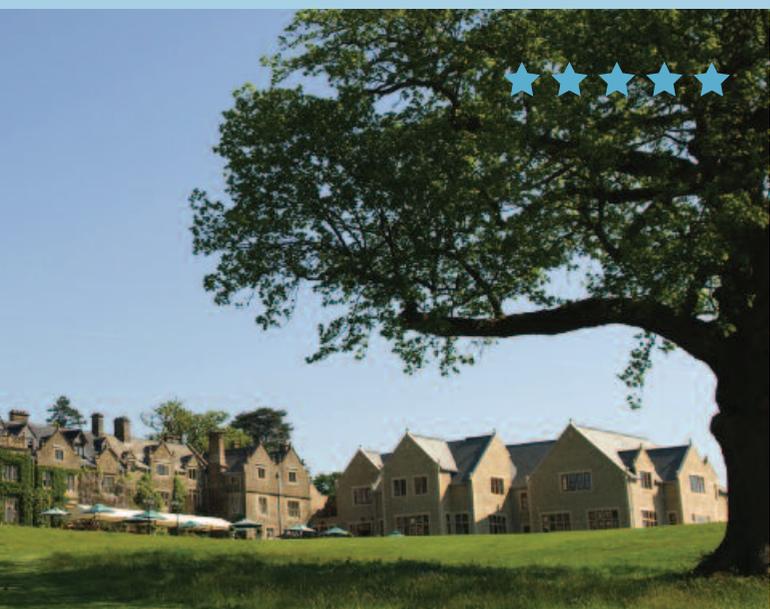
Oliver: “One small chop for me – a giant leap for the team”.

Rob: “I was so proud of what we achieved, thank you to Festo and South Lodge”.

Festo Training & Consulting

Festo offer a wide range of approaches under the general heading of team building and all keep the experience close to real business. These span from very traditional skills based, in-company low cost options, through to high end more memorable very bespoke solutions. In all cases we aim to keep the experience close to the real world so the emotional connection is retained through practical strategies in a planned pro-active way.

www.festo-didactic.co.uk



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Chris Farnath – Senior Director

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