

## case study

# *Trouble in Hotel Paradise Housekeeping Department: A case study*

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### Introduction to the Case

Guests complaints, reduced occupancy and disgruntled employees all led to the beginning of the four-star Hotel Paradise housekeeping department's demise, until a new housekeeping manager was hired. There were several challenges that the housekeeping (HK) department at Hotel Paradise was facing. The executive team thought that a new manager, Bradley Spencer, would be the answer to the current challenges. The department was without a manager for over a year. Prior to Bradley Spencer joining the team, one of the department's two senior supervisors was assigned to be the interim leader. During that time, the services eroded and the department became dysfunctional: hence, the department was unable to meet its required standards. Additionally, conflicts emerged among the supervisors. The staff was not motivated and morale was low; productivity had also declined. Teamwork and camaraderie among the staff were lacking, that negatively impacted the relationship among the team members. Guests' complaints about the quality of service emerged as occupancy rates tumbled. How could a "destination property with high ratings decline" to hurt tourism dollars?

The new manager, Bradley Spencer, was hired to bring Hotel Paradise HK department from its demise and restore excellent quality standards. His first task was to observe and get "first-hand" knowledge of the critical issues the department was facing. He observed all employees as they performed their assigned duties. After observing the employees and getting a first-hand knowledge of how they execute assigned duties, Bradley Spencer decided to conduct several meetings and discussions. The content of the meetings varied and was determined based on what he saw, what he didn't see, what employees and customers were experiencing along with the operation's goals, mission, objectives, and standard operating procedures (SOPs). Subsequently, goals and timelines were established to assist with improving the department's performance. Using a combination of reflective practices with other personal strengths, the new manager felt that he had the experience, knowledge and motivation to change things in a positive manner. He felt that his work with the supervisors in a re-training process that included updated standard operating procedures

would be the answer. Team building and motivational workshops were also organized for the staff. Initially, this led to decreased motivation and the morale went to an all-time low. There were increased call-outs by employees, claiming sickness and other crisis. Bradley felt that, in addition, with coaching and mentoring, the team would be able to transform the department into an award-winning unit.

### *Bradley Spencer Early Years and Perspectives on Leadership and Management Theories*

Early in his management career, Bradley Spencer was hired to lead and transform the operations of the housekeeping department at Hotel Paradise. Hotel Paradise is a luxury, four star, 250 room hotel that sits on a 150-acre property located in the resort town of Ocho Rios, St.

Ann, in the Caribbean Island of Jamaica. Hotel Paradise operated above a 93% occupancy, and is known for its quality service. At the time Bradley assumed office, there were four supervisors and 24 Housekeepers who were employed to carry out the daily housekeeping duties. Most of Hotel Paradise employees had been working there since the opening of the hotel, 25 years ago.

Bradley Spencer loved the hospitality and tourism industry, and has been working in it since he graduated from high school. Bradley started out in the industry as an intern and decided that was where he wanted to establish his professional career. He was determined to be successful. Bradley worked very hard and pretty soon he was assigned to management duties. Bradley knew there was no limit to his growth, therefore, when he opted to accept this new position, he was confident that one day he would make it to the level of hotel general manager and fulfill his ultimate career goal.

This leadership position took place very early in Bradley's professional career. Prior to assuming this leadership role, Bradley Spencer worked as a manager of a small restaurant, preparing and serving lunch and dinner five days a week. As a result, Bradley Spencer had 10 years of experience working in restaurants. Besides his years of experience working in the field, Bradley Spencer graduated from a recognized university in New Hampshire, USA, with a Master's degree in Organizational Leadership.

When Bradley was hired to take over the housekeeping department, he realized that he needed to take a holistic approach towards the issue at hand. He told the hotel's executive team that he believed that he was the most suitable person to turn the housekeeping de-

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partment around. He considered himself a very meticulous person, who is intrinsically motivated, with a determination to succeed. As such, he demanded high standards from his team and ensured that tasks were completed accurately, efficiently and within established deadlines. Bradley realized that it was attainable if he worked hard. Hence, it was important for him to succeed at this task. Based on West (2013), statement, he realized that leaders are held accountable for the success of the organizations that they lead. This propelled him to take on the responsibility and ownership of the project which allowed him to interact intimately with each issue until each was resolved.

Bradley Spencer studied management and leadership theories while in college. He felt that knowledge of the theories and his attitude that he had all the solutions that would make him the best manager ever. Bradley's knowledge of leadership theories focusing on concepts of leadership styles initially centered around theories of autocratic leadership and democratic leadership. These leadership theories focus on the balance of power between the leader and employees. The autocratic leader makes the decision and tells the employees what they must do. The assumption is that the leader believes s/he has the traits, and know how to solve all problems. On the other hand, the participatory theory/style involves all participants, both internally and externally. Decision making includes the opinions of all, but the final decision is made by the leader, that reflect the consideration and suggestions of all involved. This approach involves the stakeholders who will embrace and follow the decisions to meet shared goals and objectives. Participative leaders adopt a mentorship and facilitative style that employees are empowered and committed and can make decisions within defined boundaries (Rose Ngozi Amanchukwu, Gloria Jones Stanley, Nwachukwu Prince Ololube, 2015).

### ***The Issues Plaguing Hotel Paradise Housekeeping Department***

The housekeeping department had been operating without a manager for over a year. One of the two senior supervisors (Harper Douglas) in the department was given the responsibility to lead the department on an interim basis until a suitable manager/leader was identified. The decision to select Harper Douglas over Mary Dawkins resulted in major disagreements and conflicts between both supervisors. Mary Dawkins was of the notion that she should have been given the opportunity to lead the department since she had a longer tenure and she knew how to organize a productive team. Not happy with the decision made by upper level management, Mary decided to take matters into her hand. The first thing she did was to find fault with everything that Harper did. She undermined Harper's ability to make decisions on behalf of the department, as well as, carry out the department functions appropriately. She also discussed Harper's management skills with line employees who would care to listen. Mary's attention was focused on having the housekeeping team to

embrace all she said. This attempt was unsuccessful, as some employees actually liked Harper, while some did not care who was leading the department. As a result of her action, Mary lost the respect and support from some of the team members. This incident eventually led to a division among the employees in the housekeeping department. In addition, Mary would show preferences and favoritism by adding overtime to the employees who supported her action.

The situation got to a point where employees were unhappy and morale was at an all-time low. Positive interpersonal relationships among the team members were lacking, coupled with the division in support and the non-existence of teamwork and camaraderie. Additionally, the technical skills of the team members needed improvement as none of the department's employees had undergone any form of training and development in the last five years. The current SOPs used were obsolete and the supervisors had no idea about the newest and most up-to-date procedures, because none of the supervisors had gone to the yearly conferences that provided training and updated procedures for more than five years.

As a result, various housekeeping functions were not being reinforced, thus, the quality of standards, productivity, and output were low. The relationship between the housekeeping department and other key departments was also negatively impacted. The hotel's general public areas were dirty and unattractive and the guest rooms were not cleaned and maintained according to established standards. Guest complaints increased drastically. Guests were disappointed with the level of services, which was not reflective of the international advertisements that portrayed a different service level. There was a lack of focus on quality, and a lack of attention to detail. Many of the housekeepers lacked the motivation and skills to clean the rooms to an exceptional level. They felt that the supervision and focus had negatively impacted their performance. In addition, the departmental expenses were 50 % over budget each month due to lack of controls, excessive overtime pay and the inefficient use of resources by the employees. However, the supervisors felt that they knew what they needed to know to assure good housekeeping.

### ***Bradley Spencer's Intervention***

After a week of observation, Bradley Spencer the new manager hired to oversee the housekeeping department conducted a series of meetings with the department team members. The first meeting was held with Harper Douglas, the senior supervisor who had the interim leadership position. During the meeting, Bradley provided an overview of his thoughts and opinions on the leadership of the department along with his perception of her performance. Bradley also took the opportunity to point out to the supervisor where he thinks she went wrong and how she could have gained the support and respect of her colleague (fellow supervisor) and ultimately the rest of the team. Bradley Spencer, however, provided his assessments, but did not

get Harper Douglas's perspectives.

Days later, Bradley Spencer held a meeting with the other supervisor, Mary Dawkins. In both meetings, with Harper and Mary, Bradley took the time to discuss his thoughts and opinions with them, as well as, share his perspective on the matter. During this meeting, he also took the opportunity to communicate what the expectations of the department were based on their job description and requirements. The proposed goals for the department were also outlined. He also did not get the perspectives of Mary Dawkins.

Bradley later had a meeting with all the team members, where he discussed the goals of the department in great detail. Timelines were also established for attaining the goals, both short term and long term. Subsequently, a series of follow-up meetings were held with all the team members. During these discussions, Bradley shared with the team members his expectations of them in terms of how they should execute their job functions. He emphasized the fact that each team member must execute assigned roles efficiently and effectively in order to achieve the department goals and objectives. He also shared with the team that he practices and embraces participatory leadership style, yet he provided all of the solutions. Bradley Spencer assured the staff that he was willing to work with each team member in order to assist them in developing their capabilities. His aim was to ensure a high-performance level in both the technical and leadership aspects of their jobs.

The housekeeping staff was also expected to foster greater teamwork and support the senior supervisor in her role and responsibilities. They were also expected to assist in creating a work environment where all employees were willing and motivated to be productive. The final general meeting regarding the issue at hand was held with the employees as a group. The goals and objectives of the department were reiterated and reinforced. Each employee was reminded of specified roles and responsibilities, all related to achieving the department goals and objectives. At this juncture, Bradley Spencer made sure that he solicited each employee's input and participation in the discussions and the decisions. He came to realize that they were the ones who would have to implement the changes necessary, therefore, their buy-in and support were important. In previous discussions and decision making, Bradley Spencer merely said that he wanted their participation, while he made all of the decisions. He was also not sociable as immediately after he completed each of the meetings, he would dismiss the staff to do their work. There were no exchanges of thoughts among the team.

Subsequent to the meetings, a supervisory skill training workshop was conducted to equip the supervisors in team development and performance of job duties. The skills training workshops were identified as the best option to use in the retraining of the supervisory employees. The purpose was to ensure that the work performed was at a higher standard, and that eventually following the training, the housekeeping department would regain its quality assurance.

The standard operating procedures for the departmental tasks were reviewed and with the input of the supervisors', amendments were made where necessary. This was after the fact that Bradley developed the SOPs without their initially input. While the scheduled training was a good idea, the training was conducted based on old and outdated housekeeping procedures. Bradley Spencer made no effort to ensure that the training was current and relevant.

Employees were also surveyed for their feedback. Besides soliciting word-of-mouth input, an on-the-job satisfaction survey was conducted. The results from the survey revealed that the overall level of job satisfaction from an individual and a team perspective was the same and had not improved. The employees complained that they were told what to do without being allowed to provide some input. They also expressed the desire to learn new and relevant procedures relating to their job. They also asked for a summary of the guests' comments about housekeeping which they did not receive. As a result, several of the HK staff became rebellious.

Bradley seems to be very positive on paper, hence the HK standards were developed without the input from the supervisors or line employees until after the fact. He thought that the employees and supervisors were very enthusiastic about the improvements he recommended. As a result, he felt that the employees who had not embraced them should be fired. He claims that he strives to see the good in people and in the situation without focusing on the negative. Although some of the team members weren't convinced of the outcome, Bradley maintained an upbeat and optimistic view, hoping that, eventually, the employees would see the light. He believed in the words of Haslam et al. (2011) who noted that, the gap between a leader and his followers can be closed by exercising fairness at all times. He felt that as a result, each employee would develop a sense of trust and respect for his/her superior. This will eventually lead them to become more committed and dedicated to the attainment of the housekeeping department goal as well as increased output.

### ***Saving Hotel Paradise Housekeeping Department***

Hotel Paradise housekeeping employees finally asked to have a meeting with Bradley Spencer, because they thought that the new standards were obsolete. They also had issues with the new cleaning chemicals that they thought were dangerous for them to use, and the fact that some of them were not getting the work hours needed to support their families. Nonetheless, Bradley Spencer felt that the housekeeping department was improving under his leadership. There still was a lack of teamwork and the desire to meet objectives. Bradley felt that his role after the implementation of the new standards was one as a mentor and coach. The employees were told that they could have a meeting with Bradley Spencer, once there was an improvement in occupancy percentage and room revenue.

Bradley Spencer developed and implemented a performance appraisal for each employee. During the appraisal, each employee strengths were highlighted and the areas in which improvements were needed, recommendations were made. Bradley Spencer made it his duty to frequently inform and emphasize to the employees the importance of operating in a fair and consistent manner among each other. In addition, a series of conflict resolution and team-building sessions were conducted to help create a more harmonious and team-driven work environment. The employees felt that during the appraisal process, each of them would get a chance to voice their opinions about the operation and how improvements could be realized. However, Bradley did all of the talking. The normal occupancy rate that had been 95% was now down to an average of 63%. When Bradley realized that the occupancy rate had declined so much, he was disturbed. He soon realized that, yes, he had great ideas, but he needed to do something to engage the employees in order to increase productivity and occupancy.

Bradley Spencer decided to contact managers of other housekeeping departments where the occupancy was high and the hotels had good ratings. He talked to the housekeeping manager of the Ritz Carlton, the hotel company that had won the Malcolm Baldrige Award twice. He explained what he had implemented and felt that his ideas were great and that the employees seemed pleased. He noted that there are guests' complaints and the occupancy has not increased to the normal level. The manager asked a series of questions to help Bradley assess the real problems of Hotel Paradise. Bradley was told that the problem was perhaps with him and his management style. He was encouraged to attend a special supervisor of housekeeping workshop to be held in two weeks, at the Ritz Carlton Hotel. He was also encouraged to bring as many of his supervisors as he could. Bradley was disappointed that the manager made the suggestion to bring his supervisors. He felt that he should be the one to attend the workshop and bring the information back to the supervisors since he was the superior.

Reluctantly, Bradley approached the general manager of his hotel and asked for funds to attend the suggested workshop for the supervisors and for himself. He admitted that, while he had implemented some changes and was a democratic manager and an innovative leader, things had not improved as they should have. He admitted that the employees had requested a meeting with him, but he had not schedule it as yet. He felt that the employees' performance appraisals, the training of the supervisors and the review of their goals and objectives were all that was needed for improvement. He informed the general manager that he had not shared guests' comments with employees, although they had asked to review them.

The general manager approved for Bradley and two of his supervisors to attend the Ritz Carlton housekeepers' workshop. They attended the workshop and learned about the new process that the Ritz Carlton had implemented regarding cleaning, team development,

and employee engagement. They were exposed to many simulations including "how-to" simulations. Each of the supervisor was elated about the seminar as they learned about the new and relevant processes. Each was committed to going back to Hotel Paradise with their new-found knowledge, involving employees and implementing the new processes of housekeeping.

Nevertheless, challenges were experienced throughout the process of turning the housekeeping department around. As a result, the two supervisors who attended the workshop with Bradley were happy that they did, and felt that with the employees' inputs they could make progress. Nevertheless, the new approach Bradley took to owning and accepting responsibility gave him the courage to see to the completion and success of the project. Bradley's attitude depicted Lowney (2003) statement which stated that "ingenuity is the willingness to work without a script and to dream up imaginative new approaches to problems that have stymied others" (p. 127). Bradley also realized that as a leader, followers are needed to be successful.

Bradley changed his approach to leadership. He was also able to steer his team in a direction where they could identify where the department went wrong and came up with creative solutions to fix the problem. Each activity's challenge, solution, and outcome were evaluated by all members of the housekeeping department. Once he involved all team members, he was able to ensure that the department was on the right track. At the end of the process and after successfully achieving the goals established, Bradley reflected on the entire process. He also held regular meetings with his team members so that he could thank each employee individually for their hard work and dedication.

### *A New Perspective*

As a young manager, Bradley Spencer, was grateful that he attended the Ritz Carlton workshop that provided new processes and the special session that was held for managers and leaders, entitled: Lead for Results. He was now able to maintain a daily focus on the goals important to the members of the department. He was no longer myopic in his views or how to adequately lead his new team. He quickly gained the trust of the employees. This allowed him to focus on how the effective running of the housekeeping department fits into the greater whole of the organization and could eventually result in a successful and profitable operation. Bradley was able to allocate the resources necessary to enhance the department and allow it to be more efficient and effective. He worked assiduously to instill a greater sense of attention to detail among the housekeeping staff. Bradley met with his team every morning to discuss the previous day's activities including what worked well and what did not work. The current day's activities and how they were to be accomplished, were also discussed.

Bradley was able to draw on the unique qualities and strength that each person possessed, once he realized that the employees had

excellent ideas. He maintained continuous observation and dialogue with the employees. In so doing, he also was able to help each individual identify their strengths and weaknesses. This was important as it helps each individual become more cognizant of who they were. In addition, employees made suggestions on how they could make improvements and mitigate their weaknesses. The employees' unique differences and individual contributions were recognized and celebrated. This boosted their self-esteem and self-assurance and made them feel appreciated and valued. Their intrinsic drive to want to do better and achieve more made them very cooperative and open to accepting new ideas and ways of doing things. While the changes have been made in a positive light, the occupancy rate is still lagging and the guests' comments are becoming more positive.

However, a few months later, Bradley Spencer beamed with pride and joy as he walked to his office one late afternoon. He pulled his tie from around his neck, grabbed his belongings, and headed out his office door for home. As he walked through the parking lot towards his car, a happy feeling came over him as he smiles and let out a sigh, "today is a beautiful day, Hotel Paradise HK department is on top, camaraderie and team work have been restored, and the employees are embracing change; I think I will drink to that."

## Conclusion

Bradley's philosophy has always been to lead with love, a genuine care and concern for the well-being of his employees in an inclusive and supportive way. He considered himself to be a democratic leader, who has had a lot of experience and can solve any problem, related to employee issues and department operations. However, Bradley did not practice the processes of a democratic leader initially. According to Robbins and Judge (2013), leaders are considered more effective when they show concern for people and production. Bradley reflected on his growth as a leader since the early age of 22 and how he has managed to balance the well-being of his employees while achieving greater performance and productivity. While the organization exists mainly to achieve its stated goals, Bradley's perspective is that there should be a high level of job-satisfaction among the organization's members as they are the most critical component in the production of a good or service. As such, they should never be seen as the means to an end. Over the years, Bradley admits that the Ritz Carlton workshop helped him hone effective leadership skills and create an environment where employees see themselves as valued and have the ability to display effective work habits, and become loyal and trustworthy constituents.

## Case Study Questions

One of Hotel Paradise housekeeping department biggest challenges was how to work as a team to accomplish departmental functions, and build a department brand on a trusting relationship among the employees, and supervisors and department manager.

1. *Explain how Hotel Paradise housekeeping department could develop as a team, build trusting relationships among its members and create an environment that exemplifies the Hotel Paradise standards.*

**Ans.** The housekeeping department managers and supervisors need understand the value of employees' input and suggestions. An assessment of how the department reached the level of low productivity and declining occupancy rate. Policies, procedures and updates should be a part of continuous improvement. While the housekeeping department was without a manager, updates and standards should never be neglected. An environment that exemplifies quality standards should start with the general manager. There must be a continuous training and improvement schedule developed and implemented. Changes occur often and guest references change yearly. Therefore, updates are essential.

2. *What would be your approach for introducing the new processes and procedures to the housekeeping department?*

**Ans.** Develop standards as an executive team, all employees and guests. Develop processes to maintain the standards; have yearly operating updates planned for all employees. Evaluation of standards on a yearly basis is essential for success.

3. *What do you believe are the risks and benefits to Bradley's processes and procedures?*

**Ans.** Bradley had great ideas, but he felt he could solve the problems, engage the employees his way and felt that all would comply. He considered himself a democratic leader, but his behavior was not democratic. He refused initially to involve his supervisors and the employees. Once he attended the Ritz Carlton workshop, he realizes that supervisors and employees have the answers.

4. *How was Bradley Spencer able to get full commitment from the department team members? Discuss some other pointers that you think would have worked just as well.*

**Ans.** Bradley realized that he must include all members of the housekeeping staff.

Attending the workshop with supervisors helped tremendously for Bradley to realize what he must do to succeed.

5. *What do you think were the main challenges Bradley had to deal with in terms of rebuilding Hotel Paradise housekeeping department? Elaborate.*

**Ans.** Bradley was hired because Hotel Paradise was experiencing declines in occupancy, guests' satisfaction and revenue. There were problems in the housekeeping department that indicated that procedures were outdated, guests' complaints increased, hence hotel revenue decreased. Employees lost

focus and were not concentrated on Hotel Paradise's goals and objectives.

6. *In your experience, do you think that the shift Bradley took (once a team attended the Ritz Carlton's housekeeper's workshop) towards a better workplace will increase or decrease productivity and build a better work environment for the employees?*

Ans. Yes, productivity will increase; occupancy will increase, once employees are engaged in the process. Cleanliness and excellent quality standards are displayed through housekeeping and other hotel staff.

7. *Discuss whether Hotel Paradise HK department made full recovery based on the fact that Bradley Spencer beamed with pride and joy as he walked to his office one late afternoon, pulled his tie from around his neck, grabbed his belongings, and headed out his office door for home.*

Ans: It seems as if that was the case because as he walked through the parking lot towards his car, a happy feeling came over him, he smiled and let out a sigh. He also went on to say "today is a beautiful day, Hotel Paradise HK department is on top, camaraderie and team work have been restored, and the employees are embracing change; I think I will drink to that."