

The Briargate Resort: An internship balancing act

By Shane C. Blum and Mark Kelbel

Introduction

Dave Hill, The longtime Head Golf Professional at The Briargate Resort, had several decisions to make and not much time to make them. The Briargate is an upscale resort in the western United States that boasts three championship golf courses and a variety of other outdoor activities. Dave's dilemma stemmed from the fact that the resort typically hires 45 summer interns to work at the 54-hole golf complex that hosts 50,000 rounds a year including 350 corporate outings and 100 member events. However, over the past spring the resort experienced rainfall amounts that exceeded any previous totals by 50%. In a typical year the resort's rainfall is approximately 17 inches, while this spring the total was 29 inches with 18 inches coming in early spring before the end of May. Mr. Stephens, The Briargate Resort President, just called Dave and told him that parts of The Mountain Course had washed away due to the rains and that it would be closed for the entire summer season. Dave was stunned because he was about to enter into the busy summer months with only two of his three golf courses open and he had already committed to his college partners and students for a full internship staff. To make matters worse, Mr. Stephens told Dave that he wanted to meet with him the next morning to discuss Dave's new plans for golf operations for the season.

Briargate Resort History

The Briargate Resort was the vision of entrepreneur Sam Penfold and was designed and built from 1915-1918 with its doors opening to the public in 1918. It was designed and redesigned through the years with Italian Baroque architecture and is set in a majestic setting at the foot of the front range of the Rocky Mountains in the western United States. The Penfold family privately owned the resort either personally or in a trust until 1988 when another prominent family in the United States purchased it. In 2011, it was sold to the Finley Anderson family and remains privately owned. The Briargate prided itself on being family owned and that culture was evident in how it treated its employees and guests. People did not just work at The Briargate, they were part of the family and they were trained to treat guests the same way.

The Briargate Resort began as a 224 room hotel with 2,700 acres but has expanded through the years to its present state of 771 rooms

in multiple locations across nearly 6,000 acres, with 200,000 square feet of meeting space, 13 restaurants, and 18 retail outlets. The Briargate has three golf courses, the East and West Courses, which surround the resort, are serviced by the Golf Club Dining Room and the Golf Club Grille. These two courses have hosted several major USGA Championships over the years. The third course, The Mountain Course, is the newest of the three and is located at the top of a bluff overlooking the entire valley. The Mountain Course has its own 4,000 square-foot clubhouse with a 40-person capacity full-service restaurant and an 800 square-foot golf pro shop. The clubhouse is often rented by outside groups for weddings and other functions because of its spectacular views of the valley and surrounding mountains. There is also a large, full-service driving range on the edge of a cliff that overlooks the golf course and the valley below.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has listed The Briargate Resort as one of the Historic Hotels of America. The resort is also one of the longest running consecutive winners of the coveted Five Diamond Award from the American Automobile Association, having earned the award every year since 1976 ("AAA/CAA Five Diamond Hotels; 2018). The resort is also listed as a five-star resort by Forbes Travel Guide and its fine dining restaurant, The Penfold Room, named after resort founder Sam Penfold, is the only Forbes five-star and AAA five-diamond restaurant in the state ("Forbes Travel Guide", n.d.).

The Briargate Resort is one of only about a dozen properties in North America that have the distinction of being a five star/five diamond property so they are able to attract the best and the brightest employees from around the world. Overall, the resort employs 2,600 people during their high season, which runs from May through October. The resort utilizes various visa programs to ensure that they are constantly able to recruit the most talented and dedicated hospitality professionals from around the world. This necessitates working closely with the United States Department of Labor to ensure that all hiring practices are legal and requirements for hiring United States citizens are being met as well. The Briargate also hires interns every summer season to help in departments such as Human Resources, Front Desk, Food and Beverage, and Guest Services. However, none of these departments relies on interns as much as Golf Operations. The internship program in Golf Operations is vital to The Briargate Resort during the busy summer months.

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Internship Hiring History

The Briargate Resort has hired roughly the same number of golf operations interns from various college programs for the past 15 years. Each year The Briargate recruits interns from 19 Professional Golf Management programs and five hospitality and retail programs from throughout the United States. The interns assist with all areas of operation including outside operations, tournament preparation and implementation, retail sales and merchandise displays, valet, and locker room services. Many also function as golf professionals by assisting patrons with their on-course needs and providing golf lessons during the season. The interns typically work 14 weeks from the end of May until almost the end of August and are paid between \$9 to \$13 an hour based on their experience and duties. The interns are also offered discounted housing, meals, and recreational options, along with free golf and uniforms. They can also receive room and restaurant discounts for family that visit the resort during their internship.

Dave Hill is fond of hiring these interns for several reasons. Firstly, they are already studying for careers in the service industry, so they are motivated to learn more about the industry. Secondly, since this internship experience is part of their college curriculum, the students are also motivated to perform well as a poor performance appraisal could have a lasting effect on their academic progress. Thirdly, students from these programs are already somewhat familiar with golf and service standards, which helps to speed up the training process. Lastly, the interns are available to work during the resort's busy summer season and their lack of practical experience in the field makes them more affordable to hire than full-time employees.

Another reason that Dave likes hiring interns is the relationships he has built with his university partners over the years. Unlike other seasonal employees that Dave might hire, the interns are students in professional golf management and hospitality and retail management programs that are directed by university faculty and internship coordinators that have practical and academic experience in the field. This adds another level of authority that Dave appreciates because these faculty advise students through their academic and internship experiences to help ensure their successful completion of the program. If a student is not performing up to Dave's expectations he can remind the student that successful completion of the internship is a requirement for his or her degree. On occasion, Dave has even contacted his university partners to help counsel students about meeting The Briargate's performance standards and reemphasizing the importance of successfully completing the internship.

Organization and Management

The Briargate Resort is supervised and managed by a President and Chief Executive Officer and is assisted by ten directors of the various areas of hotel operations including Golf, Tennis, Grounds, Human

Resources, Facilities, Security, Guest Services, Finances, Food and Beverage and the Executive Offices. The resort's Executive Board consists of five directors and the resort's previous Chief Executive Officer heads the Board of Directors, which makes all of the business decisions for the resort. The Colorado Publishing Company plays a supportive role in the Briargate's operations and ultimately answers to Finley Anderson and his family who own the resort.

Competition

The Briargate Resort is unique in its standing within the hospitality and golf industries. It has a sterling reputation as both an exquisite hospitality venue and a treasured golf destination. However, a few properties throughout the country compete with The Briargate for hotel group business and for major golf championships. The most prevalent of these resorts are The Greenbrier Resort in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, Doral in Miami, Florida, The American Club in Kohler, Wisconsin, and The Sea Island Resort in Georgia. All of these properties are magnificent resorts that The Briargate competes against for guests and quality personnel.

Intern Selection, Roles, and Training

Students participating in the golf operations internship program at The Briargate Resort are enrolled in various golf management and hospitality and retail management programs throughout the country that require an experiential internship. Because the resort is an extremely large operation, spread out across 6,000 acres, it requires a substantial number of employees in a wide variety of critical areas. The internship program has proven to be a successful way for The Briargate to supplement its regular staff during the busy summer months to help manage several of these areas. Over the years, Dave has been able to build strong relationships with 24 universities across the country to recruit interns for the busy summer season. He is typically able to visit five or six schools in western states during the spring where he personally interviews students. He meets the majority of students from Professional Golf Management programs at the PGA Show held in Orlando, FL each January. Dave makes every effort to interview all interns face-to-face to make sure he feels they will fit in with The Briargate's culture.

Dave selects students for the internship based on their previous work experience, available dates of employment, and attitude and professionalism during their interviews. Interns are hired to perform specific tasks such as outside services, tournaments, and golf shop operations. Interns in outside services perform tasks such as golf range setup and ball pickup, bag room management, and golf cart services. Dave selects some of the more affable interns for outside services because they are often the first to greet guests as they enter the golf operations area. Unlike other internships, interns are not rotated through different positions at The Briargate since this would require too much time for training and they need to learn their jobs quickly in

order to confidently provide excellent service.

All interns go through the same orientation as the other 2,600 employees who work at The Briargate during the summer season. The training starts with a two-day orientation where the interns learn about the rich history of The Briargate Resort, are acclimated to its culture, and the resort's 16 service standards are engrained in them. That is followed by a more specific half-day orientation for the golf operations area. There the interns learn more about the history of the golf course itself and the several major championships that it has hosted. The policies and procedures for the Golf Operations area are introduced and the interns are asked to complete a training checklist that outlines everything they have learned to that point. After orientation, the interns are assigned to their area managers and are trained by employees who have been designated as certified trainers in order to learn the specifics of their job. The plan is to have the interns ready to work within a week of their arrival to the resort.

Financial Considerations

As previously mentioned, torrential spring rains washed away a large portion of one of the Briargate's three championship golf courses. The resort would have to operate during the entire busy summer season without the use of its Mountain Course. Based on previous history, The Mountain Course hosted around 8,000 rounds of golf per year. Golfers paid, on average, \$220 per round so the total revenue from tee-times alone was \$1.76 million. While it was estimated that the golf course would only be out for four months that would still result in a nearly \$600,000 loss in revenue for the resort. While The Briargate Resort would make every effort to rebook the groups and golfers from The Mountain Course to their other two golf courses, it was unclear how much of this business could actually be moved. The other courses were already heavily booked for the season or they might not be available on the exact days or times that the groups wanted. Even if the golf courses were available, other activities such as lunches, receptions, and dinners might be too difficult to rebook in the resort's restaurants and catering facilities.

After careful and methodical consideration The Briargate estimated that it could save \$350,000 for the season by cutting some staff including outside service personnel, assistant golf professionals, tournament personnel, beverage cart staff, chefs, wait staff, bartenders and maintenance personnel that would not be needed while The Mountain Course was closed. That still meant that if no other actions were taken that the resort was projected to lose \$250,000 in golf revenue alone, not to mention lost revenue from retail and food and beverage sales.

The resort's Board of Directors realized that closing The Mountain Course was a natural occurrence and was no one's fault, however they made it clear that there could be absolutely no reduction in the level of service provided to guests and members. Regardless of the

situation, Dave would be held responsible to run the day-to-day golf operation in a prudent, professional and profitable manner. Mr. Stephens, the resort's President, also made it very clear to Dave that his staff would continue to provide five-star service but that his payroll had to reflect the losses in revenue from the closed Mountain Course.

Dave knew that he was expected to manage golf operations at a profit and therefore all personnel decisions needed to be made with the financial health of The Briargate Resort in mind. The resort had always been run lean when it came to labor costs and there would be no concessions made to create work for people that had little or no return in revenue gained that mirrored their labor costs. He also knew that the decisions he made in golf operations to remedy the situation would have repercussions in other areas of the hotel including Food and Beverage, Maintenance, Retail, and to a certain degree, nearly every department in the resort.

Meeting with the President

The bulk of the dilemma that had befallen The Briargate Resort's golf operations was the responsibility of Dave Hill, their Head Golf Professional. The massive amounts of spring rain and the subsequent closing of The Mountain Course at The Briargate resulted in an unprecedented situation. Since The Briargate was now only operating with two, instead of three, golf courses the resort had too many interns and not enough work for them. Dave knew that swift and decisive action had to be taken to remedy the work force situation as sensitively and effectively as possible. He had to prepare for his meeting the next morning with Mr. Stephens because he knew he wanted to hear Dave's recommendations for a solution to this crisis.

One option that Dave considered was to cut back on some seasonal staff in outside services, retail, locker room attendants, tournament organization, valets, golf reservations, shuttle bus drivers, and golf course starter/ marshals since. This could provide substantial labor cost savings since, on average, these seasonal employees made \$19 per hour. However, there were several potential problems with this strategy. First, it would require interns to perform duties that they were not originally hired for, which would require extensive additional training. The interns had already been at the resort for three weeks when The Mountain Course was closed, so most were just getting comfortable in their jobs, and now some would essentially be asked to start all over. Second, the internship programs required certain job experiences and a 40-hour workweek, and Dave was not sure if the new assignments would be in compliance with the university's internship guidelines. Finally, the interns would be taking hours away from seasonal part-time employees, mostly those that were golf starter/ marshals, locker room attendants, and valets. The good thing was that most of these employees did not count on their wages to pay their bills, but used the seasonal work as a way to gain free golfing privileg-

es and to enjoy the special camaraderie of a golf staff. However, many of them had worked for the resort for years and Dave was worried about severing these long-time relationships.

Other relationships that Dave was very concerned about jeopardizing were the ones he had developed over the past 15 years with 24 universities, administrators, and internship coordinators. He feared that if he called and told them that he could not honor his commitment to the interns that it would end the relationships that he had worked so hard to establish. If the programs could not count on him to provide internships then there was no need for them to associate with The Briargate Resort. That would create long-term problems for Dave because the interns had become vital to the continued success of The Briargate golf operation. In addition, simply letting the interns go would put each of them in the awkward position of not meeting their academic requirements, which would affect their coursework and graduation dates. However, letting several of the 45 interns go would reduce labor costs since each made, on average, around \$11 per hour, and Dave knew that labor costs would be one of the first topics that Mr. Stephens would cover in their meeting.

Dave had a number of points on his agenda for his meeting with Mr. Stephens. He knew he needed to discuss the balancing act that needed to take place between management at The Briargate Resort, the university programs, the interns, and the seasonal employees. Mr. Stephens would definitely want a detailed plan for any proposed personnel changes concerning the interns and seasonal employees, and most importantly, a revised labor budget for the summer season. Dave also knew he would need a list of prioritized action items with a justification for each. Finally, Dave had a terrible thought, what if the damage to The Mountain Course is so severe that it is closed indefinitely, what will he and the resort do in the future if that is the case?

Discussion Points

1. What ethical questions must be addressed by The Briargate Resort and Dave when making decisions on allocating work hours to interns, seasonal, and full-time workers?
2. What alternative streams of revenue could be generated from The Mountain Course property if the golf course remained unplayable for an extended period of time?
3. What are some other ways that Dave could reduce expenses since The Mountain Course would not be open all season?
4. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of letting some of the interns go that had already committed to work at The Briargate Resort for the summer?
5. What should Dave's priority list for maintaining relationships be because of the closing of The Mountain Course?