Improving basic English communication skills for housekeeper at Elements Boutique Resort & Spa

Introduction

This report indicates that Thai staff in the tourism industry interact mostly with non-native speakers more than half of the non-natives around the world are using English as an International Language. Therefore, as the number of visitors substantially grow throughout the years, the Thai in-service tourism staff and hospitality employees should be able to communicate effectively to provide outstanding service and satisfaction to the visitors. This would bring in good reputation for the country, and thereby encourage more tourist visits and revisits.

However, the hospitality service is still in need of private and public sectors’ support in developing human resources for Thailand to be successful in the international standard (Esichaikul and Baum, 1998; Saibang, 1998; Wiriyachitra, 2001).

At Element Boutique Resort & Spa during the time that the researcher took the internship (December 2010 – May 2011), there were more than nine nationalities in total among the workforce. They were mainly non-English native speaking nationality; however, English is used as common language in work. Foreign employees were mostly in supervisor positions. However, Thai staffs had limited English communicative skills. So it is difficult for them to communicate and cooperate in work.

Barriers of communication

Education

Due to the housekeeper education background is weakness of understanding and speaking English and inability to respond to basic conversation effect guests’ satisfaction. As the researcher (Amina Mushtaq, 2008) said that the poor are marginalized not only in relation to economic processes in society, but also in relation to information and communication processes.
Culture

Moreover, miscommunication happens between Thai and Foreign colleagues that led to conflict within the organization. Due to multicultural workforce presents new challenges and opportunities to harness new skills, in particular language and cultural knowledge. In this environment, effective communication is an essential skill.

Language

Another problem of misunderstanding while people communicate is language barriers which are any differences in language like slang, jargon, translations, dialects, or semantics. Since the resort has different background of staff nationalities which sometimes they use their own style of language. Linguistic anthropologist John Gumperz is the most influential proponent of interactional sociolinguistics, which has similar origins in anthropology, sociology and sociolinguistics to the ethnography of communication, and shares its concern with the interaction of culture, society and language (Gumperz and Hymes 1972).

Wang Lin (1997:159) said that linguistic and cultural differences can be the barrier of communication: It creates the problem for receiver to complete or understand the language used by the transmitter. In English reading, cultural barriers and language cannot be separated. Language is a carrier, which not only carries the information of language, but also carries the information of culture. Every kind of language is created and developed in a certain historical circumstance of society.

On the other hand, Bernard L. Erven classified eight barriers that can affect the communication efficiency which is muddled message, stereotyping, wrong channel, lack of feedback, poor listening skills, interruption and one of them is about language. He mentioned that words are not reality. Words as the sender understands them are combined with the perceptions of those words by the receiver. Language represents only part of the whole. We fill in the rest with perceptions. Trying to understand a foreign language easily demonstrates words not being reality. A white fluffy rectangular cloth use to dry oneself after shower is called “towel” in English. The same thing is known in different languages by different names.
Until there is common understanding of a language between interlocutors, communication will not occur.

**English as medium of communication in hospitality**

Due to the growing number and the diversity of visitors to Thailand, tourism and hospitality industries need workforce with foreign languages competency especially English. Wiriyachitra (2004) asserted that there is a shortage of competent English language users in the Thai hotel and other hospitality work settings. She added that the hotel staff members’ poor communication skills often result in guests’ misunderstanding and negative attitudes towards the hotel.

National corporations are bound by the limits surrounding the borders of their country. The world is growing smaller and smart businesses take advantage of this. If you are a national corporation looking to go international, the employees who will interact with these international clients need to know the "business language of the world" - English. (Gu Wei|2011-04-06|Business ,Corporate English Language Training)

Lacking of English communication skill creates the conflict between Thai and foreign colleagues. As Ajay Kr. Sigh and D.Antony added that sometimes, in communication, we use words that do not always clearly state the picture in our minds. When this occurs, errors often result and lead to frustration. Depending on a multitude of factors (stress level for one), the error sometimes results in conflict if neither person is willing to accept responsibility for it. This caused unfavorable working atmosphere.

Additional, at any time during the communication process misunderstandings and conflicts can occur. Miscommunication can cost money, waste time, setbacks, hinder production, or even result in injury. Those are just a few examples of problems that arise when communication is not effective. From this point, it is very importance that communication should be clearly understood immediately to be effective. Clampitt & Downs, (1993) similarly support that when communication satisfaction was low, managerial evaluations of staff productivity, work quality, attendance, safety, conduct, and job longevity were low.
Improving the English proficiency

In 1997, Komgumpol developed a computer tutorial program on Practical Hotel English for Room Maids and conducted a tryout on 20 first year students at Hotel and Tourism Training Institute in Thailand. The students were asked to study by the program for three hours then they were asked to complete a test to measure their achievement. The result was that the program had more than 80% effectiveness. Also the students had positive attitude toward the computer tutorial program.

This issue led to the researcher’s interest in developing a deliberate English communicative skills training for Thai housekeepers at Elements Boutique Resort and Spa to reduce the barrier of language in the organization.

The researcher will use training course to improve housekeeper communication skill due to there is evidence that experience sometimes enhances learning (Schmidt et al., 1986; Taylor, 1975). Some even define learning as a change in behavior due to experience in a given situation (Bower and Hilgard, 1981). In this section, D.Y. Wu, E. Katok (P 839–850, 2006) further explore the effect of giving participants different hands-on experience on the simulated supply chain performance.

Most formal corporate training programs are classroom-based, and involve trainer-led instruction and specific skill transfer. While this education-oriented training demands ex-ante knowledge, the fast changing competitive environment and technological developments mean that there are not always clear-cut rules for every decision task (Gordon, 1993).

On the other hand Kay J.Bunch (Georgia State University) P. 145, said that the organizational level, training fails in at least four ways: (a) unskilled practitioners provide flawed interventions; (b) skilled practitioners provide flawed interventions because they do not have the power or influence to design a valid program; (c) skilled practitioners provide valid interventions, but learning does not transfer to the job; (d) skilled practitioners provide valid interventions that produce positive transfer, but effectiveness is not perceived. Much of
the effectiveness literature focuses on training design, content, and evaluation. There is considerable understanding of the mechanics of failure resulting from unskilled practitioners.

Chris Argyris, in a 1994 Harvard Business Review article, states that " (p. 77). He claims that many practices, considered "good" communication and training, actually impede learning by following the assumption that management is responsible for keeping employees happy and well-informed, and that employees have little responsibility for making changes themselves. Examples of this are when employees are given the opportunity to make suggestions or question management, and then executives are expected to be responsive and provide a rapid response to their complaints.

Moreover, Wendy F. Car support that the assessment of competency learning, whether the training material has been learned, is best conducted at the individual level. It is at the individual level that organizations are able to assess employees’ reactions and increased understanding. Reactions are important because, if students react negatively to a course, they are less likely to transfer what they learned to their work. Increased understanding in terms of new or improved knowledge, skills and abilities is the primary aim of a training event.

Training course can improve customer satisfaction as Ineson and Kempa (1996) identified four main skills, namely: oral and written communication skills, supervising skills (staff motivation and training), ability to engender customer satisfaction and service skills.

The technique that the researcher used is base on the theory of Oxford (1990) which mentioned that strategies could be classified into direct strategies and indirect strategies. The direct strategies are memory, cognitive and compensation strategies, whereas the indirect strategies are metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

For this case of studying, the direct strategic of memory, cognitive and compensation strategies has been used to teach housekeepers easier. From the observation of working with them as in charge as house keeping supervisor during one month in housekeeping department, it shows that they can recognize the stuffs that they get use to it.
Situation analysis

Due to differences of colleagues nationality so it is difficult for some of Thai staffs to communicate and cooperate in work. The head of departments are foreigners from different countries. For example, two owners are from UK and Belgium, General Manager is from USA, Head of Kitchen is from Lithuania, Food and Beverage is from Slovakia, Maintenance Supervisor is from Netherland, two Guests Relation officers are from Sweden, Bartender and three waitress from Philippines, a management trainee is from Slovakia and an administrator who is responsible for employee documents is from Philippines. English is used as a common language in work. However, all Thai staffs in the resort have limited English knowledge. This often causes misunderstanding and hinders tasks in work place. For example, guest asked for a new hair dryer but housekeeper could not response on the request. Again housekeeper went back to housekeeping room and called to front desk and said in Thai “Guest said something” Front desk staff had to call back to guest and asked what the guest request”. However, if the housekeeper understood one of vocabularies such as hair dryer which brought work flow and faster.

Another case of the example between housekeeper and foreign colleague at the restaurant, a waitress called to housekeeping department to ask for arrival of napkins from laundry but no one can response or said anything.

Following discussion with one owner, he identified lacking English language skill as a major problem in the resort. Therefore the researcher decided to focus on improving this specific area.

During the internship the researcher found that Housekeeping department was where the problem was most serious. While in charge of other departments, the researcher noticed that housekeepers often had difficulties responding to requests from guests and foreign colleagues.

Later when in charge of Housekeeping, the researcher had a better chance to observe the situation. Whenever a guest had a request, housekeepers could not response to it
properly. Moreover, they do not know the amenity vocabularies in guest rooms so they could not guess what the guests want.

**Objective of the studies**

- Develop individual skills in listening and speaking English towards the final goal of communicating without difficulties (be able to speak with guests on basic conversation).

- Introduce staffs to basic conversation needed in communicating with guests in hotel; let staff make their own life-like situations based on the vocabulary, and topics learned from the hotel in department;

- Improve customer satisfaction from housekeeping communication skill.

- Decrease the barrier of communication in English Language between Thai and Foreign employees and foreign guests.

**Methodologies**

This chapter presents the study inductive methods and the procedures of the study.

**Research procedures**

Four major areas covered in these procedures are Pre-Testing, Analysis and create course, Course syllabus.

- Pre Testing the communication skill of housekeepers. The researcher created one test for them. It contains 10 questions; 10 questions relating to guest requests and I found that from the sample of 10 housekeepers, only one person was able to answered three questions correctly. The rest failed.
- Analysis and create appropriate courses for department.

After getting the scores from pre test, the researcher analyzed which area of English skills that housekeepers had weaknesses. The researcher found that the staffs did not know what facilities and amenities are called in English. They did not understand even basic conversation in daily life i.e. greeting and how to respond to a greeting.

- Create the course syllabus

This training course is designed to provide staffs with listening and speaking skills. Staffs will have opportunities to participate in activities such as dialogs, discussion, and interaction with their associate. Staffs will also listen to dialogs and situations from the researcher on relating hotel topics. Moreover, the staff will learn from real situation in the guest room about all facilities and amenities inside the room.

- English Speaking Course Syllabus for H/K Department at Element Boutique Resort and Spa. The researcher created one course which contains 6 lessons for 60 hours.

Research instruments

The researcher used interview in Pre-Test and Post Test to evaluate housekeepers’ competency and a questionnaire for evaluating customer satisfaction after training course was completed.

Evaluate after finished course training by Post-Test.

Based on the theory, the researcher created a test which examines the housekeepers regarding the knowledge of vocabulary and conversation. The reason for considering the speaking training test is because task is closely related to situation housekeepers encountered in their actual work.

Conclusion
After the training program was completed, the researcher found that the appropriate course can help to improve staff skill. The Post Test result scores showed that most of the staffs who often attend the class get better scores than students who attend the class sometimes. The reason why they do not attend the class is that they can not finish work on time at 4 pm. In addition, the customer’s survey showed the majority of customers were satisfied and very satisfied with housekeeper abilities to communicate in English and able to respond to their requests.

Moreover, if the staffs do not continue practice or training the communication skill, the training course will not be effectiveness because every time trainer has to start from the beginning again and over again. Many times that the trainer observes that most of staffs need to be taught at least twice time and need to repeat otherwise they forget.

Therefore, it is noticed that housekeepers still need to keep training in order to improve quality and maintain the abilities on English communicative skills. It is very important for management to continue training program for the staffs.

Additional, the material of playing game and role play helped the staff memorized the amenities in the room easier. Due to they see them everyday when the trainer asked they can answer what it calls in English.

Moreover, another technique that can help to reduce barrier of communication is to learn different culture too. Unfortunately, the researcher has the limited of timing so the researcher can not add a culture in the classroom. Also non verbal language between Thai and Foreign people should be added in class so it will easier to understand each other better.

**Recommendation**

1. Housekeepers should be provided with a small handbook containing housekeeping vocabularies with pictures, simple conversations and frequently asked questions of guest requests and their answers.
2. After each training is completed, there should be an evaluation on English communicative skills and quality of service from customer in order to continue improving the weakness. The evaluation should be effected to job promotion and salary. It will make them pay more attention in work and in developing themselves. Moreover the motivation is very powerful for house keeper to join the class. Example, when I said next class who won from the game I have pride for them. All the staffs seemed had more attention and prepare themselves.

3. The leader or supervisor in Housekeeping department should create an encouraging atmosphere of the office by English phase cards or put picture cards with explanation of English vocabulary. For example, a picture of bed with the explanation B E D. They will automatic recognize the vocabulary very easily.

4. The management should fully support for the training. They can use outsource trainer or the most accessible training resource an employer has is its own workforce. Companies with limited budgets can conduct their own in-house training sessions led by employees with remarkable skills in specific areas. Employers can also provide access to books, videos and e-learning tools and encourage discussions among staff. Another inexpensive training technique is to join a local business association, which may yield new avenues of training options, including governmental-sponsored seminars.

5. Continue improvement and evaluate all staff’s skill every 6 months. Therefore the hotel should have a process designated to support Human Resource department to develop their staff in the right task and right time. Save time, save cost and easy to understand.

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