

Case Study: The Criterion Hotel

Financed by family connections, Lyn and Russell Fitzgerald have purchased the lease of *The Criterion Hotel* in Wup Wup, Gippsland. Both in their early 40's, have had several years' experience in the hospitality industry between them – Lyn as catering manager of an exclusive private hospital, and Russell as the manager of a backpacker hostel in St Kilda. They also have worked in a variety of clubs and city hotels. They bought into the business because of its potential. Wup Wup is located on the main highway connecting Melbourne to the tourist destination of Phillip Island. It is a small town, servicing the local rural area. Built in the late 1800's, *The Criterion Hotel* is the only pub for miles, and is a focal point for the local community. Lyn and Russell are newcomers to Wup Wup, but most of the staff are from the local district.

There are four main parts to the business – the bar, the dining room, the bottle shop, and accommodation. Lyn and Russell aim to increase business in the bar and dining room by attracting the passing international tourist trade. They have installed an espresso machine, changed the menu to reflect local produce 'with an international taste', and all bar and waiting staff have been issued with modern, new uniforms. The dining room is now called "La Bistro". They also want the bottle shop to increase sales, as a drive through service has just been opened. *The Criterion Hotel* has a relaxed family atmosphere amongst the employees (indeed, some are related to each other). Unemployment is very high in the region, so staff generally feel lucky to have a local job. There are 12 full time employees, and extra casual staff are used for busier Friday and Saturday nights. As licensee owners, Lyn and Russell work between the split shifts whenever and wherever they are needed.

Last month there was a serious problem. The business lost potential customers, causing tension and bad feelings between the owners and the staff. Employee morale is affecting productivity. There were a number of incidents which contributed to the Saturday crisis. Accommodation at the hotel was bulging at the seams due to the Wup Wup High School reunion, and three bedrooms had been inadvertently double booked – the receptionist had stepped out of the office for a break and Peter, the barman, had taken the booking manually over the phone. Also, some of the guests complained that their rooms had not been serviced properly.

The San Remo Fishermen's Club was having its annual crayfish banquet in *La Bistro*. In addition, Lyn had arranged for a bus of Japanese tourists to stop in for an early dinner on their way to see the fairy penguins at Phillip Island; plus, the Wup Wup Football Club had scheduled their pre-season fund raiser dinner for that date.

It was going to be a busy night in the dining room. The new staff uniforms had been delivered, and there were grumbles about looking like religious cult members. It was generally felt by the staff that only a person as thin as a greyhound and as tall as a giraffe would look any good with the cut of the style (designed by Lyn, without any staff input or consultation). The receptionist had overheard Russell talking on the phone to Employment National, saying that they wanted someone young and energetic, who was good with money and customer oriented, and who could handle food as well as bar work. She passed this information on to her cousin Peter, the barman. He told his wife – one of the waiting staff, and his nephew, who worked in the bottle shop. Staff members felt their jobs were under threat.

In the bar, a fight broke out between the asparagus pickers from Koo Wee Rup, and the roustabouts who were in town setting up for the Lang Lang Rodeo down the highway. The brawl spilled out into the car park, and in the general excitement someone cleaned out the cash register and took a case of Bundaberg Rum from the unattended bottle shop.

Dinner was a disaster. Competent in catering for 60 settings, the kitchen didn't have the correct ingredients available for the new menu. The new menu had been designed by Russell who dismissed any suggestions made by Chef Brendan as 'too country bumpkin'. With the extra number of diners, the overloaded oven took twice as long to heat the apricot stuffed chicken breasts; the kitchen hand Denise overcooked the crayfish; and there weren't enough plates because Roger, the dishwasher, had failed to turn up for work.

The Japanese tourist guides complained that they weren't 'Greeted & Seated', that the staff member (Lilian) just talked to the bus driver; the menu on a blackboard was written only in English; the meal was late and the waiting staff were rude. Furthermore, the toilet facilities weren't properly cleaned.

Lyn and Russell were angry at the way things just fell apart; people didn't seem to take responsibility for their jobs. When they first took over the hotel they had planned to get all the staff together for a meeting, but it would have cost them too much in wages. Instead they were going to speak to everyone individually, but what with all the work they were doing they hadn't got around to it. "It is just so hard to get good staff" they said, in unison.

Source: M. O'Connell (2016) "A Case Study. The Criterion Hotel". Available on: https://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lsu/content/2_assessmenttasks/assess_tuts/case%20study_LL/case%20study.pdf [26.12.2016.]