

London Bridge Is NOT Falling Down

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It is hard to talk about the London Bridge Resort without noting the history that brought this resort and in fact the entire town of Lake Havasu City into existence. Robert McCullouch, CEO of McCullouch Chain Saws wanted a gimmick to draw people to the town he founded in the middle of the desert. His vision included dredging a channel off Lake Havasu and installing the London Bridge in 1968 with the completion of work and dedication in October 1971.

Adjacent to the waterway is the London Bridge Resort. As you walk into the lobby, an enormous gold gilded carriage straight out of a fairy tale greets you. Constructed from paper mache, it is an exact replica of the Queen of England's carriage. This carriage was a gift to McCullouch and found its way to the resort. Cal Sheehy, Vice President and General Manager said, "I'm not sure how it came to be the centerpiece of the London Bridge Resort lobby except that the carriage is so big, it just seemed like a good place to put it."

He may not know all the history of the queen's carriage, but when Cal Sheehy says he knows his business from the bottom to the top, you can believe it. Sheehy started working at the London Bridge Resort in 1995 cleaning toilets. He rose through the ranks doing most jobs required in this hospitality business. He left the resort and took the position of Regional Manager for Sunterra, one of the largest time-share groups in the country. In 2004, he returned as Vice President and General Manager.

The London Bridge Resort is working to make up growth lost after September 11. "We are almost back to pre-9/11. We are focused on increasing occupancy and average daily rates annually to offset growth losses during the post 9/11 period," said Sheehy. "The biggest challenges we currently face are hiring staff and keeping up with current trends. One trend is that guests want to stay in a luxurious residential resort. That means constantly increasing the room appeal with, for example, upgraded bed linens and mattresses."

The more difficult challenge is staffing. "Our staff is the key. Staff members touch each experience a guest has while in our resort. Without proper staff it affects our success," said Sheehy. The hiring, training and retention of staff is critical.

Any operation can improve by paying close attention to staffing. London Bridge best practices include:

1. Selecting people carefully. "Staff are difficult to find," said Sheehy. London Bridge Resort's practice of looking hard and choosing well is one that many businesses, especially service businesses, would do well to emulate. "When someone who does not willingly serve the public is hired, it is almost more damaging than being short staffed."
2. Orient new hires properly. The resort employs what they call a "big picture orientation." They focus on all operations and how each job contributes to success. Sheehy pays attention to connections and values staff training. Twice a year, the resort holds a biannual employee meeting with motivational seminars and learning skits where department heads play different roles connecting employees to various departments.
3. Retain your good people. Besides the usual benefit package, the resort knows that awards, feedback and recognition are important. They have a variety of employee incentives and an employee relations committee stays on top of employee concerns and issues.

McCullouch's gimmick to draw people to Lake Havasu City worked as over a million visitors come every year. London Bridge Resort is a big part of that success.

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