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## ACHIEVING A FIVE STAR SERVICE THROUGH WORKING TIME CHANGE

Every hotel sets out to offer its guests the very highest standards of service and achieve the prestige that comes with the magical five star rating. However, retaining regular, valued employees and reducing a reliance on seasonal agency workers can prove an issue. The luxurious Celtic Manor Resort has taken an innovative approach to addressing both the needs of employees and maintaining a five star service.

The Celtic Manor Resort, situated in the Usk Valley near Newport in South Wales, has the enviable task of hosting Golf's Ryder Cup in 2010. Its three golf courses are considered some of the finest in the UK and a regular stop for the professionals on the European Tour, with the facilities and service of its Manor House and Resort Hotels second to none.

In 2006, the Resort set out on a programme of working time change for its employees to ensure that it could maintain its high standards. It brought in Working Time Solutions, a UK based solutions provider, which specialises in implementing working time change, to look at how this could be done whilst also improving the work/life balance of its staff.

Kevin White, managing director of Working Time Solutions and one of the UK's leading working time change experts, explains: "The hotel and hospitality industries have some staffing issues that are unique to the sector and almost universal. That is, it can be over reliant on seasonal or agency employees, particularly at busy times. This means that the industry as a whole has a staff turnover of 50 per cent.

"This reliance on agency staff can prove costly. Agency employees are typically more expensive than their permanent counterparts, are usually considerably less experienced

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and less well-trained and as a result, permanent employees can struggle to work effectively along side them.

“The seasonal demand of the industry also makes things difficult for employees,” adds Kevin. “Working times can be unpredictable, which can make it difficult to balance work with family life. It can be difficult to take holidays and in some cases staff are being asked to take them at short notice, and even on a weekly basis, working patterns can be disjointed.”

Mark Colcomb, Vice President Finance for the Celtic Manor Resort adds: “We heard about Working Time Solutions and what they could help us achieve having worked on a previous project at Gleneagles. Our focus in the first instance was very much our conference business. Conferences account for 50 per cent of our revenue and we were keen to look at ways we could achieve the highest levels of service whilst reducing costs. We wanted to make the best use of our existing full-time and part-time team members, giving them and us as much flexibility as possible, and to bring in casual and agency staff only as a last resort when we are extremely busy.”

The recommendations that Working Time Solutions offered the Celtic Manor included the introduction of squad-based rostering for both full and part-time staff and a committed days system, where staff knew which days they were working, though not necessarily the exact hours. This included rostering in time for holidays and increasing the notice period in which shifts were confirmed to help employees manage their time in and out of work better. It also retained an overtime option for employees who wanted it.

Central to the project was a shift pattern generation system, designed by Working Time Solutions and implemented in partnership with the Celtic Manor and an Employee Working group to ensure their buy in to the project. The system allowed managers to model various shift patterns in line with demand, issue rosters six months in advance,

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and improve planning for staff holidays and absence. A new operating manual for employees was also introduced and the responsibility of all rostering moved to one central resource planner, freeing up additional management time.

“There were some teething issues” admits Mark. “For a project like this to work, the buy-in of staff is vital. We also found that managers were reluctant to relinquish control over their rotas. As the system has evolved though, they have become increasingly comfortable with it and now fully appreciate the benefit.

“Since we implemented the system, we calculate we have saved in excess of £250,000 in labour costs. Our employees enjoy a greater work/life balance, particularly important for those with children, and all can enjoy a higher guaranteed income and overtime and more usable leisure time. Motivation and morale has never been better, staff turnover is down by 10 per cent and absence due to sickness has fallen three per cent. Both of these figures are excellent in comparison to industry averages. For managers, a reduction in temporary staff has led to even higher service levels and reduced their administrative burden.

“We are now looking at other areas of the business that will benefit from a similar project. We can already see the advantages of introducing it to kitchens and housekeeping.”

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