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Marc Whitley

The River Bar & Restaurant, the Lowry hotel, Manchester

THE JUDGES

Geoff Booth,
director for the School
of Hospitality,
Westminster Kingsway
College

Charles Boyd,
chief executive,
Chester Boyd

Paul Hackett,
key account
executive/senior
inspector, AA Hotel
Services

Peter Hazzard,
chairman,
Chaddlewood
Consulting

John Mackle,
general manager,
the Granary Beefeater
and Peterborough
(Ferry Meadows)
Premier Inn

Stephen Moss,
chairman,
Springboard UK

With 25 years' experience in the industry – everywhere from Colorado to the Caribbean – it's no surprise that Marc Whitley has steered the River Bar & Restaurant to success in these times of economic uncertainty.

The River restaurant is the flagship for the five-star Lowry hotel, part of the Rocco Forte Collection, so it's no small undertaking. Managing a team of 30, Whitley is responsible for everything including staff, menus, guests and bookings.

Conscious of the economic climate, Whitley has taken the initiative to bring together key hotel staff for a weekly meeting to ensure that all hotel promotions and marketing are being maximised. In addition, he is constantly coming up with his own new ideas to tempt guests.

For instance, he has introduced a Men's Afternoon Tea, which, along with other incentives, has helped afternoon tea service achieve 300% growth year-on-year. Similarly, a new family-style Sunday lunch service was launched with a promotional offer and achieved 100% growth in just six weeks. And as a testament to the high standards of food and service in the restaurant, a "pay what you think it's worth" promotion saw all customers pay the full price after just one month.

Equally importantly, Whitley is focused on managing and developing his team. He has shown great passion in improving their skills to ensure career progression. To this end his four restaurant managers and supervisors have been promoted through the ranks from waiter level and he has trained one of his team to the position of assistant sommelier. To empower his team further, he has recently given a supervisor and a waiter the added responsibility of being trainers. Incentives such as these explain why his staff retention rate is high, at 67.6%.

Not all Whitley's good work is in the hotel, though. Since joining the Lowry, he has become a member of the Academy of Culinary Arts, where he strives to improve training and promote the industry as a career choice through college and school visits.

What the judges said...

"All the short-listed finalists demonstrate that with hard work, great leadership, a passion for the job and teamwork they succeed and deliver customer appreciation and loyalty. They should be rightly proud of the important role they play in the success of their individual business."

Peter Hazzard, chairman, Chaddlewood Consulting

THE SHORTLIST

Mark Bevan,
Simon Radley at the
Chester Grosvenor,
Cheshire
Cedric Chirossel,
the Castle at Taunton,
Somerset
Lisa Edwards,
Village Hotel & Leisure
Club, Walsall
Marc Whitley,
the River Bar and
Restaurant at the
Lowry hotel,
Manchester

FORMER WINNERS

2007 Nicolas Roulier,
Seaham Hall hotel,
County Durham
2008 Loris Lucchini,
the Chesterfield
Mayfair, London