

Creating a world-class, creative customer service culture at Earls Court and Olympia

The Problem

London's landmark event venues, Earls Court and Olympia (EC&O), were sold by P&O in 1999 when exasperated event organisers decided to build an alternative venue in the Docklands.

The new owners lost large chunks of business and when the new venue actually opened its doors in 2000 the board asked their customers what they should do.

They said "Get relationships right at every level and we will choose you every time."

The Process

Working with the leadership team at EC&O, the ?What If! team immersed themselves in the organisation. First of all they heard the following feedback from people throughout the organisation:

- "We're all up for it but we're not sure what 'it' really is"
- "It's Marketing vs Ops vs Event Management – we're not on the same team"
- "Staff initiatives are not good enough, management are not people orientated"
- "It would be nice to know if there's an overall game plan"

This feedback (plus much, much more) was taken back to the board and a drive team of customer-centric individuals from around the business was formed to invent a way forward. The ?What If! team then worked with the drive team to:

- formulate their mission and unearth their values
- walk them through 'how it could be' and help them generate 1, 3 and 5 year goals
- create engagement workshops and train EC&O champions to deliver them so that the ?What If! team could step back and enable EC&O to take the baton

The Solution

A new core purpose was developed which gave birth to EC&O's "guest philosophy".

With ?What If! guidance the team also created an organisation that was clear about what it does and how it goes about doing it.

Using the feedback gained, the team focused on:

- identifying and training champions to support the change across the business
- getting all staff to experience the vision and values via workshops delivered by staff themselves
- leadership development
- measurement and feedback using words rather than numbers
- sharing stories and celebrating value-led behaviours
- training and recruiting in line with the values

The next phase involved taking this work to EC&O's service partner network. Again ?What If! worked with the team at EC&O to create the tools and techniques for this and trained two of EC&O's champions to lead the project themselves.

The Results

Customers - "There's been a huge jump in staff attitude – everyone wants to help"

"It's the best attention I've ever had from a venue"

Staff - "Having a common vision and value set has been an important part of establishing our integrity"

"We're winning business because we're living our values – we're not dropping our prices"

"There's no confusion, no misinterpretation"

Financials - The business was bought in 1999 for £180m and sold 3 years after the project started for £255m



"What If! were not the obvious choice for this project but the results went far beyond the original brief. They were unique to work with, bringing their engaging energy and off-the-wall thinking, which stimulated our team enormously."
 Andrew Morris, Chief Executive NEC Group, previously Chief Executive EC&O

The Kick Off!



With new competition on the horizon, the board decided some customer feedback was needed. Des Morris carried out this research, he invited our top 15 customers to think about what they need from us.

"The single biggest difference you could make would be to treat our customers as if they were your own customers."

"This is not about tinkering with customer service – a few improvements here and there... it's about a quantum leap..."

"It's about not just satisfying people, but delighting people there's another whole barrier to be broken through..."

"If the company can't dramatically change and energise the buildings, it has to change and energise the people and their relationships."

How are we going to get there?



By now the team had listened to lots of different points of view and felt plenty of confusion.
 They realised the importance of establishing what we are in business to achieve
 -the way we go about doing things here at the EC&O Group

Core purpose

The EC&O business exists to help our customers...
 After a few weeks of living with this statement the group decided to make some amendments - can you tell what it is yet?

Here you can see exactly what the team came up with

WE ARE DEVOTED TO DELIVERING THE BEST EXPERIENCES THAT BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER TO HELP IN OUR DREAMS

We finally arrived at...

'We create environments that fulfil our guests' dreams'

This statement alone has shaped our new "Guest philosophy" which is about everyone in the company treating customers as if they are a guest in their own home. The "Guest philosophy" also serves as a reminder that anyone who comes into contact with the company should be treated as a guest - be they an organiser, exhibitor, visitor, contractor etc. This includes those people who walk through our doors, call us up, send us post or e-mail, and those who visit our websites.

So now the team had defined what we are in business for and why we exist as a company. The next step was to figure out how we go about our business...

...by unearthing our values.

Values

Having found what links us all together, the team began to explore our collective attitude as an organisation - what behaviours our guests experience when they visit us. This exercise was about unearthing our values and giving them a name.

The team traveled through the results of 2 major research projects and eventually whittled them down to four key words...

Passion / Imagination / Care / Trust

Below is an example of the team testing out the values they unearthed...

Passion to guests	Imagination to guests	Care to guests	Trust to guests
It's about... Showing our passion for our guests and our business	It's about... Thinking differently Showing our imagination for our guests	It's about... Showing our care for our guests and our business	It's about... Showing our trust for our guests and our business
Passion at EC&O "We're here for you - you're here for us"	Imagination at EC&O "We're here for you - you're here for us"	Care at EC&O "We're here for you - you're here for us"	Trust at EC&O "We're here for you - you're here for us"
It's about... Showing our passion for our guests and our business	It's about... Thinking differently Showing our imagination for our guests	It's about... Showing our care for our guests and our business	It's about... Showing our trust for our guests and our business

How could it be?



The team spent some time thinking about where all this could take us in the future...

1st year goals
(what we need to do)

3rd year goals
(where it could take us)

Big hairy goals
(where it could take us if we dare to dream)

First year goals

- We will train and invest in our people
- We will have a measure of the success of our guest philosophy
- We will have identified, trained and established 25 service ambassadors (now called champions)
 - including service partners
- We will understand our customer needs and adapt accordingly
- We will explain why we are here, where we are going and how we will get there



Third year goals

- We will lead the UK exhibition and events industry
- We will have re-organised our business to satisfy our guests' needs
- We will have become an organisation that lives its values
- We will increase our profitability by a quarter
- We will influence the choice of marketing expenditure - more businesses will use exhibitions to market their products / services over other forms of media



Big Hairy goals

- We will become a business with global reach
- We will revolutionise the expectations of our guests

