

Apex Hotels is a family owned collection of ten hotels in London, Bath, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee, some of the UK's most popular cities. Each contemporary hotel has an individual character in keeping with the diversity of individuals that make up any family. Each hotel is designed to give customers an authentic and tailored warm welcome.



Business Improvement Academy Project

Susan (Food & Beverage Manager), Nodar (Deputy General Manager Apex Grassmarket) and Kim (Director of Sales, Scotland) have a collective 54 years of experience at Apex Hotels and they came together to apply the BIA programme to the business. Prior to applying an improvement project the team summarised the key learnings from the BIA in what it meant to them:

- Identifying a problem may seem easy however to make a long lasting effect, we now understand the importance of research and testing the problems and solutions.
- Processes and Procedures are vital in all businesses from manufacturing to hospitality, BUT these should also be subject to challenge and changed or removed if they become wasteful
- Cost of Waste - every £1 wasted or spent equates to £10 of additional sales needed
- The need for continuous improvement
- Lean management truly is about cultural transformation

- The biggest light bulb moment for us was the realisation that Apex are really good at identifying opportunities to improve LEAN management and great at analysing the needs and solutions.

Project Analysis

The team felt that as the business has lots of processes and procedures it would have been easy to pick one to streamline or demonstrate their ability to identify waste and reduce it. However they wanted to make a **bigger difference** to the company, one that would impact every area of Apex and this led them to focus on the cultural change process and more specifically how they communicate change. They demonstrated how they have seen some great projects gather momentum only to stall, highlighting that in its simplest form **Lean failure** is due to a lack of company culture change.

The PDCA model was used to analyse where they believed Apex do well delivering projects and where they don't. They discovered that they were good at identifying, creating and analysing, but fall short in implementing **Long Term Change**.

Analysing Apex Initiatives

Peachy Mondays - an amazing opportunity for Apex to engage with staff, a tool in which positive messages are communicated and successes celebrated learning from staff with the ability to share results

within 4 weeks. The team found that this was not reaching its potential. **Warmer Welcome** - aimed at getting back to the heart of the business, working to strengths and setting Apex apart from its competitors. When speaking to clients and staff and asking what Apex meant to them, a "brand" was created to market Apex and create an ethos in which to train staff. Every staff member was to live and breathe "Warmer Welcome". Again this was not reaching its full potential across the business. **K1 licenses** - another example of the company's eagerness to invest in staff and open up new lines of communication in a world of changing technology. These were abandoned as they were not being used by staff. **Shadow Executive Committee** - Initiated by the Executive Team looking to involve staff more in projects and develop new talent from within Apex. Again after initial success the initiative was not sustaining full potential.

Making the Case for Improvement

Just using these examples, the team highlighted that a whopping £1,731,661 worth of sales revenue is required to cover the costs of these projects and that equates to 21,000 room nights to be sold, or alternatively the Apex Haymarket Hotel would need to be on full occupancy every night for a year. This visibility of costs motivated the team to use more of their

learnings from the BIA to understand where it was going wrong.

A process map was developed on what they wanted to investigate to really get to the granular detail of a project. Rather than taking a blanket approach to "Projects" and assume they were all the same, they looked at each project individually and then sought out the commonalities of their failings. Whilst they already knew that they were good at **PLAN** and **DO** there was realisation that the business needed to improve its ability to **CHECK** and **ACT** – **ultimately what was missing is that they don't have a formal Process for Delivering Change.**

Preparing for Change

Understanding that it was a process failure, Kotter's 8 step model was deployed to benchmark the current process for delivering cultural change. This highlighted good vision, a good sense of urgency and an element of coalition (the first 3 of Kotter's 8 steps) - the problems began to arise within the communication step. The new process will:

- **INCREASE URGENCY** - the team have already engaged with key stakeholders and have been invited to the next Executive Team meeting to review findings
- **BUILD COALITIONS** - one of the recommendations is the need to Build Coalitions for each project, by forming project teams closer to the detail.
- **VISION** - Develop a Project of Change SOP. Apex have SOP's for every part of their business, so why not have an SOP for Projects - after all they now understand the true value/cost to the business.
- **COMMUNICATION** - make this form part of the SOP or Project manifesto - ensuring maximum use of in house tools, using better language and tone of voice to ensure that it makes people feel

more supported and more about the benefits to them than about the benefits to Apex

- **ENABLE ACTION** - allowing people to be involved in the project teams and empower them. It will also prevent the project from being too singularly focused and allow Apex to not only see how it will impact on other areas of the business but also how it could be used in other areas
- **QUICK WINS** - The SOP will ensure the project team set down and define ongoing SMART objectives and goals to continually test the project
- **DON'T LET UP** - Set controls around processes and document what the expectations of the project are
- **MAKE IT STICK** - Test out the process continually at key points throughout project and where necessary change the plan not the goal.

Business Benefits

This project has allowed Apex Hotels to better understand why past projects have achieved varying degrees of success and has provided the Executive Team with further clarity regarding the management of project in the company going forward. A good example of this is the formation of the Apex "Innovation Board" which has been put together following the conclusion of this project and the company has already made changes to the way in which this new group will focus on the task they have been assigned "review of the Apex Hotels Customer Journey". We have assigned one of our General Managers to oversee this group, have engaged Franklin Covey to deliver a three day "7 habits of highly effective people" programme and utilisation of the "managing projects" material also provided by Franklin Covey. In addition, periodic feedback sessions have been diarised for the Executive

Team to review progress. A "kick off" meeting with the 8 members of this innovation board has been arranged for 19 December having taken into account the recommendation "Set controls around processes and document what the expectations of the project are"

"We found the journey in the Business Improvement Academy interesting, it pushed us all out of our comfort zone and allowed us to work together in a team, something that may not have happened in our everyday roles in the business. It's our hope that our findings are listened to and acted upon and we see improvement in future projects"

The team at the Apex
Hotels