



BY CHOICE HOTELS

Quality Suites Toronto Airport

OSSA Groundbreaker Profile

When Bernd Bohl assumed the role of General Manager at the Quality Suites Toronto Airport three years ago the hotel was experiencing many health and safety challenges. Faced with ever-increasing premiums, diminishing morale, and an overall lack of interest in health and safety, Bohl and his management team quickly came to the realization that changes needed to be made.

Mike Vieira had just been hired as the new Executive Housekeeper for the hotel. While Vieira didn't have a background in health and safety he was keenly interested in taking a proactive approach to improving health and safety in his department and in the hotel as a whole.

Bohl and Vieira enlisted the support of OSSA Consultant, Cathy Moran and since that time they have been working diligently with the rest of the management team at Quality Suites to integrate health and safety in their workplace.

Q. What caused the change in attitude toward health and safety at the Quality Suites

Our focus on health and safety started in the Housekeeping Department but quickly expanded to include the entire organization. We were seeing particular problems in Housekeeping but when we went to the root of the problem we saw that many of the issues were psychological. People were unhappy. This is one of the reasons why our premiums were so high. We took this information and turned our efforts toward developing a proactive approach to health and safety.

You have to be able to look at your operation critically. You have to identify the barriers. Previously the hotel had been putting band aids on the situation. But we needed to look at the root of the problem.

Since we started working with OSSA we have put many systems and measurements in place. And, we are seeing the results. We are seeing fewer slips and falls and hurt backs and our premiums are lower.

We have taken positive action to create a positive attitude and this is producing tangible results.

Company Snapshot

Sector:

Tourism and Hospitality

Location:

Toronto

Number of Employees:

100

Quality Suites Toronto Airport is a member of the Choice Hotel chain and INNVEST REIT. It is a 15 year-old facility that has recently revamped its outlook on health and safety.

We spoke with Bernd Bohl, General Manager of Quality Suites and member of OSSA's Board of Directors and Tourism and Hospitality Advisory Committee, about the benefits Quality Suites is realizing from an integrated approach to health and safety.

Integration Milestones:

- Received Integration Needs Assessment Feedback from OSSA
- Developed an Action Plan
- Currently working on activities identified in the Action Plan

Q. *Is your senior management team committed to an integrated approach to health and safety?*

Our management team is not a large one. There are six of us. We are a close team. We work together, support and advise one another. Health & Safety as a whole has become a vital part of our day-to-day operation. The Management Team and subsequently the employees, particularly in the operational Departments, have come to realize that operating in a healthy, safe and positive work environment is in general "a good thing". In this industry, we spend about 8 hours plus per day at work, so we all have an interest in making this part of our lives as positive as possible.

Health and Safety has been built into our monthly management meetings. And, every Department is represented on the Joint Health and Safety Committee so there is strong management support of the committee's activities. All of our managers follow up on the recommendations that come from the committee.

Anyone in a supervisory role has health and safety built into their performance evaluation. They realize that unless they follow through they run the risk of endangering their employees, their productivity and the success of the hotel. They have seen the benefits. Many of them know what it used to be like so their support grows as they see things improving.

Q. *Why is it so important for employees to understand that the management team views health and safety as a top priority?*

There is a much more positive attitude among our employees. Their outlook toward their jobs and the customer has improved drastically and we have fewer lost days. Focusing on health and safety is a big part of that.

Employees enjoy work and feel positive because they know their concerns are heard. They feel better about themselves and productivity goes up. A customer can see the difference between an employee who enjoys their job and one that doesn't.

And, our financial analysis shows the impact of this approach. We are not only meeting our targets, we are exceeding them. Frankly this is not because this is an exceptional facility. It is 15 years old and many of the rooms are original. It is because of our staff.

Q. *How do you reinforce accountability for health and safety in your organization?*

Our employees are held accountable by their supervisors and supervisors are measured on health and safety in their performance reviews. It is easy to monitor the performance in each department by simply looking at injuries, health and safety claims and grievances. We also see it in our profit and loss statements. Improvements in these areas are the truest indicators of success.

Q. How do you instill the importance of health and safety within your operation?

Health and Safety is incorporated into the hiring process. We have a unique return to work policy and we discuss that during the hiring process. This policy sends two important messages. It sends a message of caring because we want to assist our employees in their recovery. The second is that it sends a message about our commitment to Health and Safety.

Employees see that the company is seriously interested in creating and maintaining a healthy environment. It is a necessity that won't ever become a secondary priority. They see this when they seek assistance and they get the help they need. They have seen a positive response to their opinions and suggestions and they have seen us invest in health and safety. For example, we have invested in improving the health and safety in many Departments – even those that are typically deemed as secondary priorities in the hotel industry such as Food and Beverage.

Q. Why do you feel an integrated approach is so important to health and safety success?

Health & Safety as a whole has become a vital part of our day-to-day operation. An integrated approach ensures that daily activities in the hotel are conducted in a clean, safe, healthy and successful way.

We empower our employees, to act on every observation they make. With this common agreement, our employees are looking out for each other and they are developing a common approach towards doing their jobs in a healthy and safe way. This is having a direct impact on our overall operational results.

Q. Why is Quality Suites Toronto Airport sharing its experience with other properties?

Many properties in our company are going through the same situation that we did a few years ago. I am sharing my experience in meetings and one-on-one conversations. The recipient has to be open and willing to change. It is an education process. My roles as an advisory committee member and as a member of OSSA's Board of Directors are helping me to get the word out there. I will take any chance I can get to talk about our success in Health and Safety.