SHOP TALK # 43:
Region 6 Adapts TISESL to the Needs of Learners

This is a success story. It breaks all the molds, and sustaining it requires some serious thinking outside the box by all parties involved. Read on and become inspired…

Education Service Center Region 6 is not new to workforce literacy endeavors. Over the years it has offered a variety of workforce-related instruction, using a variety of funding sources. One of its most recent successes has been to offer industry-related English language instruction to employees at the Hilton Hotel in College Station.

Hilton’s Director of Human Resources, Angela Orozco, went looking for ESL instruction for hotel employees in the housekeeping, maintenance, kitchen, wait staff, and laundry departments. She found community classes full and distant from the hotel, but was put in touch with Lupe Schneider, Region 6’s instructional coordinator for that area. Region 6 agreed to offer instruction at the hotel and proceeded to assess the employees’ needs. Assessment results indicated that employees had extremely limited English language skills and were functioning at a low beginning level – actually below the recommended level for TISESL use. Every effort was made to introduce the TISESL Sales and Service curriculum to this group of employees, but the materials were deemed too advanced for the learners. Still, Lupe and instructor Carla Horelica persisted. They adopted the concept of TISESL and adapted the materials until they felt they could adequately respond to the employees’ needs.

The instructor can make all the difference. Determined to meet the needs of the learners, Carla photographed every aspect of “hotel life”. She turned the photos into a power point representation of the “back of the house”, capturing the work stations and job tasks of the employees in housekeeping, maintenance, kitchen, restaurant, and laundry departments. Her photos included snapshots of the “front of the house” operations as well, since employees sometimes rotate positions and find themselves interacting with hotel guests in unexpected ways. With a flash drive and an LCD projector provided by the hotel, Carla started the classes.

In addition, the instructor procured samples of job-related products for the classroom – everything from guest size shampoo and cleaning supplies to tools and room service information. Finally, the instructor pulled from the TISESL Sales and Service curriculum and complemented it with specific vocabulary for every hotel department represented by the employees. Soon, instructor and employees came up with a list of questions they were likely to be asked by hotel guests and wanted to be able to answer.

What began as one class a year and a half ago has grown to two classes. Employees are now identified as either beginning or low intermediate. Even now skill levels and proficiencies vary greatly. Employees are progressing and are requesting additional
instruction time. Region 6 hopes to utilize Retention Education's *Sed de Saber* to supplement classroom instruction. The hotel management’s support is phenomenal. Although employees attend classes on their own time, the hotel provides a number of incentives and supports. Employees have access to the hotel's internet service and two computer stations at the hotel. They also have opportunities to build their computer literacy on lap top computers provided by Region 6. Learners have completed their online insurance enrollment as well as twenty hours of driver awareness and safety training. The instructor has access to the hotel’s business center for whatever is needed in the way of photocopying.

Hotel management is committed to continuing the classes indefinitely. Management finds that employees are better able to participate in weekly meetings. Their self confidence has increased and they are more comfortable interacting with hotel management. Longevity in employment has increased, and trust in the instructor and hotel personnel has grown. Management also encourages employees to participate in job rotation opportunities so they learn more about other employment options within the hotel. One employee moved on to become the night shift supervisor for housekeeping; another is starting his own pool service business and now cares for the hotel’s pool and spa areas.

Another plus to this partnership is that the hotel’s general manager serves on the board of the Texas Hotels and Lodging Association. Wouldn’t it be great to engage the hotel and lodging industry on a greater scale? There’s something to think about.

For additional information about this initiative, contact Lupe Schneider at lschneider@esc6.net.