

## ***Bridging the Gap: Smile in any Language***

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### **Case Study Summary**

This case starts with a description of the situation at a small, limited-service hotel faced with a language challenge within their housekeeping department. This problem is common among U.S. hotels and the hotel management team is exploring options to address it. Currently, their approach is piecemeal, and they need to explore more professional options and create a cohesive approach to recruiting and training new employees who are English Language Learners. The options are explained in the case. Students explore these options and identify three preferred options for the case hotel to focus on through a detailed implementation plan.

### **Teaching Objectives**

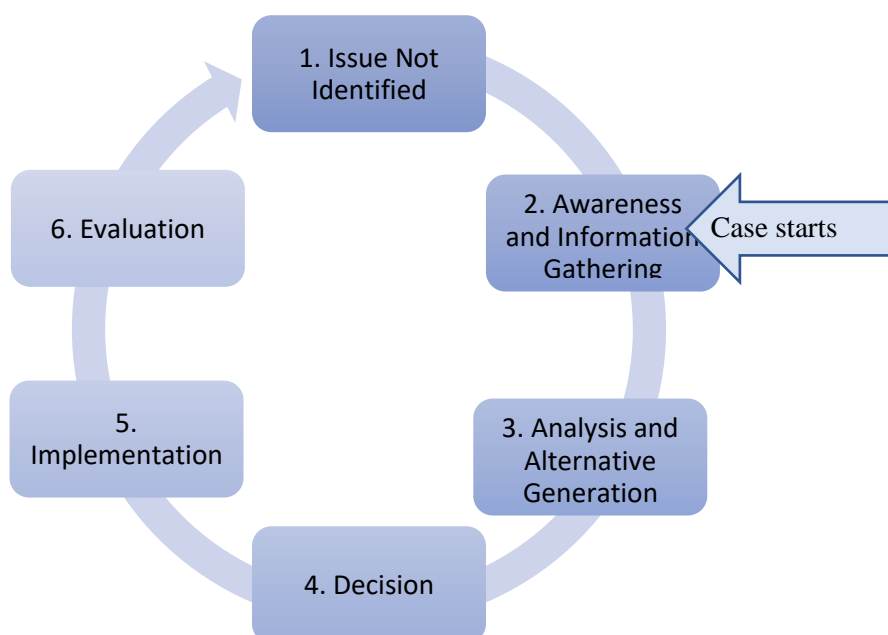
The primary learning objective for this case is to evaluate options for hotel hiring and operations managers who would like to seek employees who do not speak English as their first language. This case discusses the problems encountered when **hiring** and **training** English Language Learners (ELL) to perform entry-level hotel operations positions and prompts students to explore options to overcome these problems. This case study is a decision-making case that has students create a plan to implement three viable options to address the problems presented in the case. Alternatively, this case could be used in ESL teacher training coursework.

### **Target Audience**

This case is intended for an audience of third or fourth year (300- or 400-level) hospitality students in a services management or human resource management course. The case analysis could be modified for a lower division course.

### **Recommended Teaching Approach & Strategy**

This case begins at the point of awareness and information gathering.



To prepare for the class, have the students review the case and conduct a brief case analysis before coming to class. Provide students with a template to summarize the key information from the case and answer several case-related questions. Have students summarize the key information from the case and the current situation at the case business. Case analysis is approached from the decision-maker’s point of view.

WHO is the decision-maker?	Shannon and the hotel management team; could also talk about community college partners as decision-makers.
WHAT is the business problem we are trying to solve? What are some of the underlying issues?	How can a small hotel with limited resources provide new or prospective employees and managers with language education that is appropriate for each position, while accommodating the differing levels of language brought to work by ELL employees?  The management team needs to evaluate alternatives for hiring and training employees who do not speak “enough” English to perform entry-level hotel operations positions.
WHY has this become a problem? How do we know there is a problem? What led to the current situation?	The hotel has ongoing staffing needs and is looking for great employees. Competition for employees is high. Shannon could partner with her local community college to improve the language skills of applicants, which will provide a pipeline of applicants for the hotel.
WHEN does the business problem need to be resolved? Is it urgent? Why or why not?	The case begins at the point of awareness and information gathering. While the problem is not urgent, it is important and needs to be addressed soon. If the hotel chooses to partner with the local community college, they will find that the academic environment moves slowly.

Students work through analysis, generating alternative ideas, using details from the case. Provide students with a list of questions to answer while reviewing the case, as pre-work for the case discussion session.

### Analysis of Teaching Objectives and Theoretical Concepts

The primary learning objective for this case is to evaluate options for hotel hiring and operations managers who would like to seek employees who do not speak English as their first language. This case discusses the problems encountered when **hiring** and **training** English Language Learners (ELL) to perform entry-level hotel operations positions and prompts students to explore options to overcome these problems. After reviewing the WHO/WHAT/WHY/WHEN focus your discussion on the questions presented in the case. See question 8 for a suggested in-class activity. Answers to the questions are included here.

- 1) What is the current state of hiring for the hotel in this case?
  - Most housekeeping employees at the hotel are immigrants and their first language is not English.
  - Varying levels of English are spoken, and language training is needed
  - Language training resources are limited, and recruiting is a challenge
  - Outside agencies are used to recruit immigrants

- 2) What are common hiring practices for U.S. companies for hiring employees who do not speak English?
- Working with outside agencies to recruit employees
  - Employee referrals (friends, family members, etc.)
  - Use of translated materials, use of formal and informal interpreters
- 3) How do referrals from existing employees work? Is the process of requesting/accepting employee referrals beneficial to the hotel? What are the pros and cons of this practice?
- Often one employee who speaks good English is hired and then that employee refers their family members or friends to the hotel. These referrals often result in small groups of employees from the same country and the first employee hired (with good English) serves as an informal interpreter for the others.
  - Pros: This practice is beneficial because it shows that an employee likes their job enough to encourage others to work there. It can help to improve employee loyalty.
  - Cons: It can cause challenges when you have family members or friends working together. It can be difficult or cumbersome for the original employee to function as an interpreter. It can also cause problems when sensitive subjects need to be communicated (in this case, a professional interpreter should be hired).
- 4) What are some examples of companies the hotel in the case uses to recruit new employees? Look up some of these organizations on the Internet. Are there any located near you? Do their websites discuss employee language training?
- FareStart, Housing Hope, Goodwill, World Vision, Salvation Army, Office for Refugee Resettlement, other refugee centers, etc.
- 5) Imagine you are a housekeeping room attendant/housekeeper. What are keywords you might need to know on the job?
- Examples: vacuum, sheets, towels, bed, carpet, cleaning chemicals, etc.
- 6) What are some of the ways the hotel demonstrates the success of Kolb's theory of experiential learning?
- Partnering new employees during training and using demonstration without words.
  - Using pictures on-the-job to illustrate a job that has been done properly (i.e., a bed made the "right" way).
- 7) Create a list of three language training alternatives that would work for this hotel.
- Options for interpreters/translators
    - Google Translate
    - Hiring interpreters
    - Using family members
  - Options for training employees
    - Creating documents in many languages
    - Creating visual aides to decrease need for language
    - Utilize external language preparation resources
    - Community college ESL programs
    - Other ESL programs
    - Create internal language preparation resources
    - Hire an ESL specialist to collaborate with employees
- 8) **(Include this question with discussion questions or remove it from the list and use as an in-class group activity, or have students hand it in as an individual assignment.)** Create an implementation plan for the hotel with detailed action steps to help them implement these three alternatives. Consider short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions.
- Assorted items can be included on the action plan. Students need to identify the length of time included for each timeframe. Actions should be specific and include active language.

## Additional Readings

- Madrigal-Hopes, D. L., Villavicencio, E., Foote, M. M., & Green, C. (2014). Transforming English language learners' work readiness: Case studies in explicit, work-specific vocabulary instruction. *Adult Learning*, 25(2), 47-56.
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