



Dare to Connect: How Training Staff in Emotional Intelligence Improved Crowne Plaza's Customer Experience

“We've seen how applying an added layer of empathy to our guest interactions greatly improves the stay experience — Mike Greenup, Vice President, Marketing

In 2018 Crowne Plaza piloted an emotional intelligence (EI) program called Dare to Connect across four of their locations in the UK. The program was designed to upskill hotel staff by training them to become more attuned to guests' needs. Crowne Plaza recognized that developing a human connection allows employees to provide better customer service, resulting in higher customer satisfaction and more positive reviews for the hotel. Let's take a look at how EI helped them get there.

→ THE PROBLEM

The hotel industry depends heavily on positive reviews. Nearly 40% of customers make accommodation decisions based on others' reviews, and nearly 20% of customers make decisions based on their own previous experience.¹ Interactions with hotel staff can be an important part of that experience. In fact, some of the most uplifting and most infuriating moments occur at the front-desk. This is also where customers will form their critical first impressions. Research has shown that 24% of customers who have a good first impression are likely to remain loyal for up to two years, and 87% will tell other customers about the good experience they had. This effect is even stronger for a negative first impression; 95% of customers who have a bad experience will share that experience with others.² This means organizations in the service industry need to be proactive about creating positive first impressions through good customer service. Dare to Connect was designed to help Crowne Plaza do just that.



→ THE SOLUTION

Dare to Connect was piloted in 2018 at four locations in the UK (Leeds, Manchester City Centre, Newcastle Stephenson Quarter, and Dublin Blanchardstown).³ The program was designed to teach hotel staff EI skills that would help them identify and cater to customers' needs. In addition, the 'Life Skills' module, which was created by EI experts at The School of Life, was intended to provide employees with valuable tools and resources to support them in both their personal and professional lives.³ At the end of Crowne Plaza's trial year, overall service scores had improved by 4%, experience scores improved by 5%, and the hotels that were a part of the pilot saw an influx of positive guest reviews. The program was then launched successfully in Crowne Plaza hotels across 98 locations in Europe at the start of the following year.

ABOUT CROWNE PLAZA

Crowne Plaza is an IHG hotel that targets business travelers with the motto, "making business work." They've positioned themselves in a premium market using upscale branding, services, and amenities. Crowne Plaza is located primarily in major urban centers, gateway cities, and resort destinations, and currently has 429 hotels (119,804 rooms) in 65 countries all around the world.⁵

→ HOW THEY GOT THERE

Dare to Connect was facilitated by the department heads at each hotel, demonstrating Crowne Plaza's top-down endorsement of the program. The program's modules focused on six core emotional intelligence skills: Vulnerability, Self-belief, Connection, Anticipation, Authenticity, and Perseverance. Given Crowne Plaza's target market, hotel staff were also instructed on ways to alleviate guests' anxiety by responding to and anticipating the particular emotional needs clients are likely to experience when travelling for work. In addition, The School of Life also provided tools to support a more connected experience for guests. These tools included "Destination Postcards," which were handed to guests upon check in to encourage connection with family and friends at home, and a "Better Meetings" tool, a box of questions, games, and activities designed to help guests have more engaging and productive meetings when travelling for work.³ Mike Greenup, Vice President of Marketing for Crowne Plaza, commented on the EI training program saying, "While we understand that business travelers appreciate efficient and functional service, we've seen how applying an added layer of empathy to our guest interactions greatly improves the stay experience."³

Curiously, EI training not only benefits clients, it also benefits employees. Studies have shown that individuals who are more emotionally intelligent are likely to report higher levels of happiness.⁴ Happier employees tend to provide better service, and customers are more likely to enjoy interacting with happy employees than those who are stressed or dejected. This finding has been demonstrated across multiple studies⁴ and confirms the benefit of investing in EI training, both for your customers and the well-being of your team.



IHG HOTELS

IHG's roots trace back to 1777 when William Bass began his journey from a local brewery owner to international hospitality player. A century after his first brewery was opened in Burton-on-Trent, UK, Bass' name was registered as the UK's first trademark under the UK's Trade Marks Registration Act 1875. This made Bass a pioneer in international brand marketing. Nearly another century later, in 2000, Bass acquired Southern Pacific Hotels Corporation in Australia and US-based hotel management company, Bristol Hotels & Resorts Inc, while Bass' brewing operations were bought by Interbrew (now Anheuser-Busch InBev). In 2001 Bass's hotel company was renamed Six Continents, and in 2003 it split into InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) and a retail business called Mitchells & Butlers. Since then, IHG has acquired multiple global hotel brands and launched many of their own (including boutique Hotel Indigo, wellness-based EVEN Hotels, and luxury Chinese brand HUALUXE®).⁶

→ KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE MATTERS** The value of EI is often underestimated and is therefore usually overlooked in employee development programs. Crowne Plaza's Dare to Connect makes a strong case for investing in EI development, demonstrating the significant impact these skills can have on improving customer experience and employee well-being.
2. **CONNECTION MATTERS** Crowne Plaza recognized that interactions between staff and customers were a key indicator of positive customer reviews. In an era of automation, the value of human interaction is often discounted, but perhaps now more than ever we've begun to see our need for human connection. Companies like Crowne Plaza have a unique opportunity here; they can use personal touchpoints to foster meaningful interactions in a way that improves both customer and employee satisfaction.
3. **EMPLOYEE MORALE MATTERS** Happy employees equal happy customers. In addition to training your employees on EI skills, ensure that you are motivating your team and monitoring morale.

→ HOW SIGMA CAN HELP

Like Crowne Plaza, you can boost your employees' EI and improve customer satisfaction. SIGMA is here to help! Take a look at our [Multidimensional Emotional Intelligence Assessment - Workplace - Revised \(MEIA-W-R\)](#). The MEIA-W-R is a brief, personality-based assessment that measures 11 distinct dimensions of EI, tailored to a workplace setting. The assessment can be used to understand employee behavior and emotion, develop self-awareness, build critical people skills, assist with interpersonal issues, and conduct research in a variety of settings. The assessment also includes a comprehensive MEIA-W-R Development Report based on individual results.

[Contact us](#) if you have questions or would like to speak with an executive coach about how we can help you understand and develop your emotional intelligence.



FUN FACTS

- Crowne Plaza's portfolio has doubled since 2003 to more than 400 hotels⁷
- Crowne Plaza has a Sleep Advantage[®] Program that includes aromatherapy kits in partnership with Temple Spa (whose amenities are also offered on-site), Premium Bedding, Quiet Zones, and Guaranteed Wake Up Calls⁸
- Each Crowne Plaza has a trained Meetings Director who ensures meeting are simple for clients, including acting as the point of contact for all guests' professional meetings, providing personalized proposals within 24 hours of a meeting request, conducting banquet and catering facility tours, arranging meeting flow, set-up, group room blocks, billing, etc., and providing on-site support during meetings⁹
- The Crowne Plaza in Old City Istanbul was originally built by Turkish architect Mimar Kemaleddin as a series 1920s neoclassical building, which has since been converted to a 257-room hotel¹⁰
- Crowne Plaza's Amsterdam – South location has a restaurant called Happyhappyjoyjoy Zuidas (specializing in Asian cuisine)¹⁰
- For a small fee, some Crowne Plaza Hotels allow pets in designated rooms
- IHG was the world's first hotel company to announce its switch from bathroom miniatures to larger-size amenities in an effort to reduce single-use plastic waste (estimated to remove 200 million tiny bottles of shampoo, conditioner, bodywash, and lotion each year)⁶

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