

'Sultanate should set a new benchmark in customer care service'



Photograph for illustrative purpose only

Our Correspondent Muscat

With Oman working to becoming a major tourist destination in the Gulf region, the country needs to improve its customer care services, Robert MacLean, principal of the National Hospitality Institute (NHI) has said.

"Oman is a fast developing nation, and with an expanding services sector, and increasing number of visitors, it is about time we should upgrade and develop skills throughout the sultanate and set a new benchmark for customer care. Great customer care starts with a smile and this is where the name comes from," said MacLean, adding that NHI's training programme, 'Smiles of Oman' is working towards this goal.

Launched in 2012, the first-of-its-kind training programme aims to raise standards of customer service skills in sectors such as banks, retail, telecommunications and hotels across the coun-

try. Organisations that sign up for 'Smiles of Oman' training programmes are visited by mystery shoppers who assess staff skills. Employees are then scheduled for 'Smiles of Oman' training programme, which caters to three levels of customer care staff.

In addition, the NHI has also introduced Good Service Bonus Cards, which is part of the Smiles of Oman campaign. These cards are handed out to anyone who shows good customer service. It encourages and rewards professionals who go the extra mile.

"We introduced the cards to encourage those shining stars who deliver great customer care," said MacLean.

"We wanted to do something positive to encourage the people who serve us. An individual who gets the card receives a small reward - mostly phone credit."

Nitin Sapre, general manager of Europcar said, "The Smiles of Oman is a one-of-its-kind initiative in the country and it is fantastic. We have shared a cordial

relationship with NHI and we value customer service in our business. Over the last three years we have created a quality customer service culture in our business and invested significantly in training programmes which included classroom style and on the job programmes, mystery shopper surveys and launched a Net Promoter Program to get feedback from every customer who rents from Europcar.

Sapre added that more awareness needs to be created to encourage businesses to invest in customer service initiatives. "In the age of digital media, our customers rank our services every day. We believe a good customer service is quintessential for any business."

Appreciating NHI's initiative, Daynise Awad, owner, Caravans Flower Shop in Qurm said, "I think that the idea introduced by NHI is an encouraging gesture as people in the service industry, dealing with the public, are rewarded and recognised for their good service.

"I do think, however, that the idea needs to be developed further, involving more sponsors and participants, so that it is well marketed. Smiles of Oman is a step in the right direction to encourage and motivate those in the service industry. I feel that the tourism side, hotels, guides are actually well serviced but retail area might need improvement. Also, the customers should realise that if they smile you will get a smile back."