

Summary

OPPORTUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Innovate to provide dynamic work experience and career pathways to attract, develop and retain new talent (especially young graduates), to ensure a reliable pipeline of employees
ACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developed a structured learning and career development programme, known as ME LEAP! (or Masters of Experience Learn And Progress), which involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teaching ME Associates essential skills in both the Front Office and Food & Beverage departments ▪ Deploying ME Associates across departments and hotels to optimise manpower and staff exposure ▪ Creating well-rounded hospitality professionals through active feedback sessions, on-the-job training, and classroom learning
RESULTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased productivity within and across the departments for both Ramada and Days hotels through multiskilling ▪ Promoted 40% of ME Associates within and across the departments, expanding the hotel's talent pool ▪ Enhanced the Ramada and Days Hotels brand in Singapore, driving brand awareness among hospitality professionals and target student groups ▪ Managed turnover due to strong employee engagement and through open communication

OPPORTUNITY

INVESTING IN TALENT DEVELOPMENT, ADDRESSING NEEDS OF YOUNGER WORKFORCE

When first opening in Singapore in December 2012 (for Days Hotel) and May 2013 (Ramada), both hotels at Zhongshan Park had an ambition common to the hospitality industry: attract and retain good talent, and harnessing them to raise productivity. To achieve this goal – and to ensure a reliable pipeline of employees – the hotels' Human Resources department identified the need to innovate on the typical career offering.

More specifically, HR understands young job seekers seek employment opportunities with wide and varied exposure, high responsibility as well as leadership and management skills development. The HR team and all department heads also worked towards cultivating a culture where ME Associates are able to be themselves and contribute to the hotel with their unique strengths and skills.

To tap on the diverse skills of these candidates and provide them with the opportunity to become well-rounded hospitality professionals, HR sought to provide employees a progressive career development plan that cultivates their core competencies on the job, enabling them to advance upon completing each module while gaining practical work experience.

The ME LEAP! programme was designed to provide clarity and ownership for employees to shape their development path within the hotel, with the chance to role-shadow a senior management member to develop business acumen and prepare for the next stage of career growth.

ME LEAP! covers Front Office and Food & Beverage across the two hotels, as these were key departments for future leaders to have a good grasp of. Fig. 1 shows the plan communicated to potential hires, with different phases cleanly laid out. Elaine Fong, Learning and Development Manager, highlighted ME associates and the rest of their employees is what differentiates Ramada and Days from competitors, noting the associates hired have been outstanding. "We want to attract people who are open-minded and excited about working different facets of a hotel. We want talent who seek opportunities to stretch themselves in different areas and lead the business."

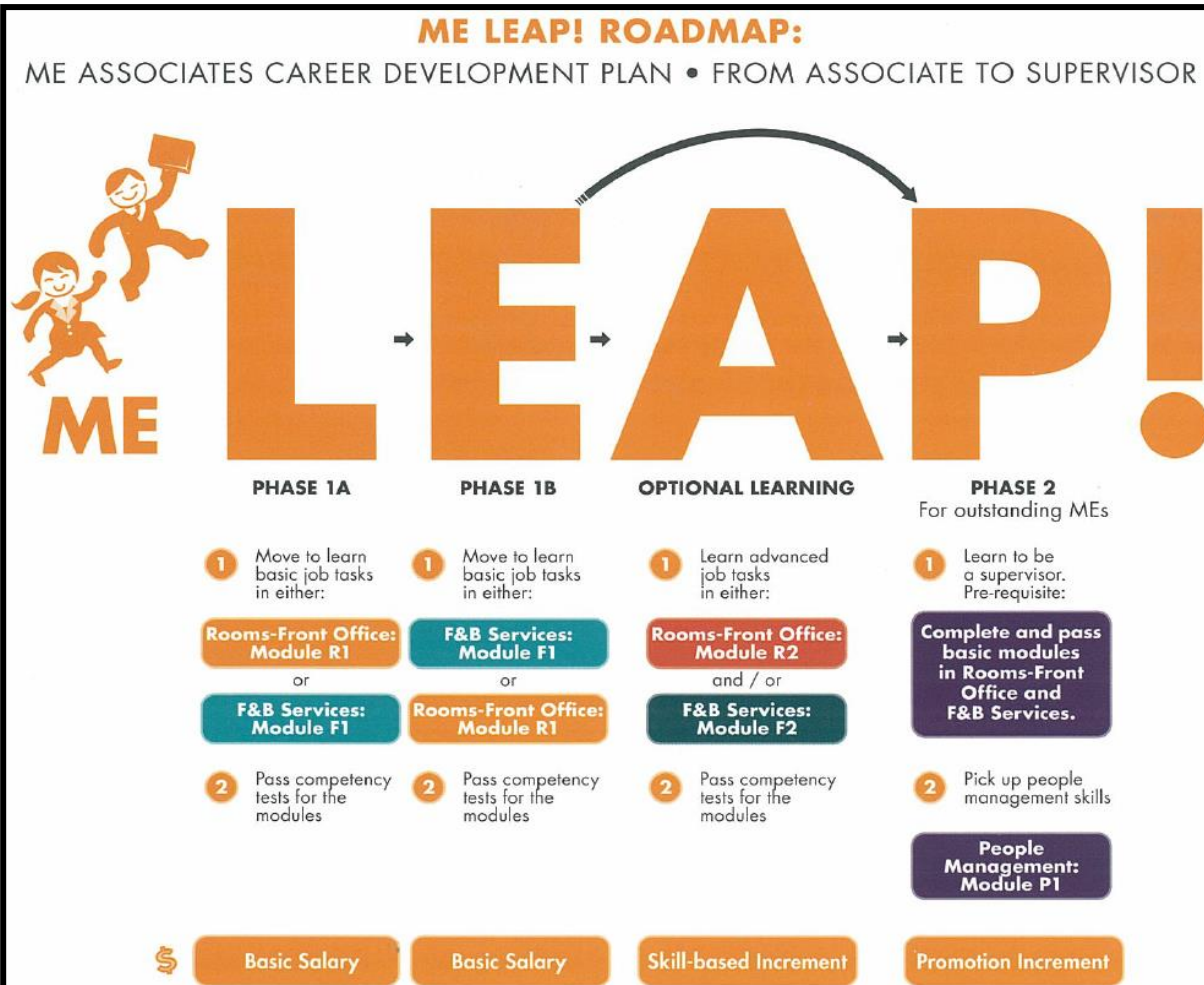


Fig. 1: ME LEAP! with the phases of competency development



Photo 2: ME Associates work in both Front Office and F&B to optimise exposure

Key Steps

- **Leveraging experience and insights to overcome a common challenge:** HR recognised the typical industry challenge of losing talent due to the perceived lack of progression or transparency in career development. More importantly, the management identified an innovative solution, by being listening to needs of potential employees, and designing a solution that served their needs, along with the hotels’.
- **Collaborating with other departments to create a robust training framework:** Once HR shared the idea of ME LEAP!, management within each department – as well as the senior leadership – immediately saw the programme’s potential and supported its implementation. Relevant departments (HR, Front Office and F&B) collaborated to design a robust programme to train and measure competency.
- **Attracting first batch of MEs:** Ramada and Days actively recruited from hospitality schools such as University of Nevada, Las Vegas and various local polytechnics, to spread awareness of ME LEAP! to students and to clearly communicate the phased career development plans.
- **Refining the programme based on participant needs and feedback:** As a part of the programme, HR initiates a two-way feedback process for all ME Associates. These employees receive input from management on their learning progression and skill development, and also provide input on the programme’s effectiveness and areas for improvement.

Key Success Factors

- **Discipline in selecting for “fit”:** Selection of candidates were based on their attitude and personality, regardless of age and paper qualifications. This reflects the hotels’ commitment to creating a welcoming environment that values the right service attitude.
- **Structured training:** ME Associates get to learn via 9 WSQ modules (with 4 customised for the hotels) with Ascott Centre of Excellence, giving them a classroom view of operations work prior to actual deployment, preparing them better for different roles.
- **Stepped approach to operations:** Most ME Associates start with Days Hotel first as their operations are less complicated and serve as a good starting point, especially for hires who have not worked in hotels before. They then rotate to Ramada for exposure to a complex service standard.
- **Variety in exposure for employees:** Younger employees appreciated that they are not stuck in one role and have different tasks to accomplish even within a day. This reduces boredom with operations—a common issue with younger employees.

“We pride ourselves on our employment practices and we believe that our hotel is going in the right direction in terms of training our talent and giving them a meaningful work experience and the chance to progress.”

-- Elaine Chan
Human Resources Manager
Ramada and Days Hotels

Project period: The planning and launch of ME LEAP! took about 3 months, with the planning done pre-opening.

Estimated cost: The investment cost to develop this programme was about S\$180K.

As of end Feb 2014, of the 34 MEs hired, 14 have been promoted to ME Executives and other positions. The hotels also saw enhanced productivity levels and better managed retention rates since the introduction of this innovative programme.

- **Promotion of the ME Associates to ME Executives:** Outstanding associates who have passed the basic modules and displayed leadership qualities were promoted to ME Executives. In this new role, they are able to choose their area of specialisation and take on leadership roles in the hotels. Since the launch, 6 ME Associates were promoted to ME Executive (Front Office), 2 to Assistant Concierge, 2 to Captain (F&B) and 3 to Sales/HR/Finance teams.
- **Value in ME recognised by employees and competitors:** HR is seeing more non-ME associates asking to join the programme. Some high-performing associates have since been trained as MEs. Several outstanding ME Associates have also been offered opportunities by competitors. Instead of taking this negatively, the hotels are proud to see their employees being highly valued by the industry.
- **Enhanced productivity levels:** ME Associates are effectively deployable between two departments across both Ramada and Days. By hiring suitable, motivated talent who are open to change, both hotels can do more with optimised teams.
- **Staff rewarded for flexibility:** A gain-sharing incentive (~10% on top of wage) is offered to the ME Associates for their contribution towards saving business costs through their flexibility and added skill sets.
- **Expanding to Housekeeping department:** With early success, HR is working to include the housekeeping department into ME LEAP! to attract a wider range of employees, expand skill sets and further enhance collective productivity.
- **Official launch of the Role Shadowing Programme:** Ramada and Days hotels are working towards the Role Shadowing Programme such that outstanding MEs have the opportunity earlier on in their careers to learn from the management team, gain insights on the business management front and be groomed as the future leaders in their fields.



“I was looking for career opportunities that embrace my personality and allow me to be myself. Being a ME allowed that and made me realise I really enjoy being in the service industry. ME LEAP! built my basic knowledge and skill sets in Front Office and F&B services; while the multi-skilling allow us to know each department’s challenges, making work and communication much more effective.”

*-- Alvin Lian
Assistant Concierge
Former ME (pre-opening team)
Ramada and Days Hotels*

While we want our employees to stay with us, we want them to go far in their career in the hotel industry. We are pleased that ME is contributing to the overall talent pool for the industry. We are staying abreast of market trend/practices, listening to the voices of our associates and will refine our programmes, where necessary, to attract and retain talents.

*-- Josephine Chua
Director of Human Resources
Ramada and Days Hotels*