Case Study Review

McDonald’s is one of the world’s most renowned fast food restaurants, serving over 50 million customers each day in over 100 countries (Our Story, n.d.). In 1961, seven years after the restaurants birth, McDonald’s founder Ray Kroc also founded Hamburger University (HU), in efforts to educate its leaders and management. Today Hamburger University, with an acceptance rate less than that of Ivy League Harvard University, graduates approximately 5,000 students per year in programs for crewmembers, managers, mid-management, and executive development Hamburger University delivers courses online, at the restaurant, via 22 regional training centers, and at its 7 global campuses, including the main campus in Elk Grove, Illinois. In order to get into the actual degree programs, prospective students must compete for an assistant management position that will allow them the recommendation of admission to the program. While all McDonald’s employees are exposed to Hamburger University via their 19 online training modules, most will never have the honor of attending the college (Combs, et. al, 2013).

**Proposed Support System**

Hamburger University is an opportunity that opens doors to participants that may not have otherwise been opened. McDonald’s Hamburger University is able to offer college credits to graduates via its partnership with the American Council on Education. According to the restaurants website, “nearly 50% of our corporate restaurant managers started out as crew [and] so did more than 60% of our owner operators” (McDonalds-Working Here). But what of the employees that deserve, but do not get the opportunity to attend the university; how do they get the opportunity to progress? Furthermore, what of the graduates? How do they ensure progression? It is the purpose of this paper to discuss a support system for students that will allow *more* McDonald’s employees to progress to the next level of employment and to aid them in achieving their career goals through opening Hamburger University to more participants. Most learning institutions have career services departments to provide this type of support to their students; corporate training programs should have the same.

The ultimate goals of this program will be to increase learner satisfaction, capitalize on learning outcomes, and show return on investment. Learner satisfaction is key for the success of HU because it is the learners that are the future of the company. Graduates of HU are expected to be the future managers and owners of restaurants, meaning that McDonald’s is investing it its own future by educating students. If students are not satisfied and decide to withdraw from the program or leave the company, McDonald’s will not see return. Therefore, adding a program that commits to the long-term success of the students is capitalizing on the learning and ensuring return on investment.

**Elements of the System**

In order to provide new support to Hamburger University students, there will be several elements that will implementation. The first element that would need to change is the Admissions department. Admissions will need to adjust selection criteria to accept students based on merit, rather than recommendation, to ensure students are admitted fairly and without discrimination, favoritism, or bias. This element will be added to ensure that the right students are being admitted to the program—students that are committed to their own success and who have worked hard to get in and will continue to work hard after the program. A career services department will be added to the institution that will direct students and graduates in the correct path to progression. The departments will be able to answer questions students have to determine the next steps after graduation. Services provided will include:

* Resume and Cover Letter Review
* Job search
* Interview Scheduling
* Information Sessions
* Networking Events
* Coordinating continuing education courses

It will also be the job of this department to map and track the progression of each student and graduate. Lastly, counseling and mentoring will also be added to ensure that students know what steps to take after graduation. The mentorship is important to keep students on the right track to success and to teach leadership skills and characteristics that can not be learned in the classroom.

**Organization and Staff**

Admissions will only require an adjustment of policies and standards, but McDonald’s will need to invest in a career services department. The career services department will be an extension of HU and will require at least two fulltime, representatives at each campus. Each campus representative will be responsible for knowing what advancement opportunities are available within the organization. In order to do this, they will need to partner with McDonald’s human resources to know which opportunities are available internationally. Students should have the privilege of using the career services department to locate leadership opportunities as well as preference during the hiring process. Mentors would be volunteers, including past graduates, owners, and corporate managers, depending on the students desired career track. Because these positions will serve only a small amount of graduates each year, the staff will be commensurate with the graduates they serve. As the number of graduates and success of the program grows, so will the Career Services department.

**Existing Resources versus Additional Resources**

McDonald’s has invested a large amount of money and resources to Hamburger University. With the company’s current resources, the career services program can successfully exist between human resources and Hamburger University employees. Tasks can be distributed amongst the current human resources employees and recruiters to pinpoint opportunities and post them on a special portal available only to HU graduates. Mentors will still be able to perform their roles, but will require a leader to coordinate them. With that being said, the program can exist with existing resources, but it will be not successful. The Ray Croc once said, “If were going to go anywhere, we’ve got to have talent. And I’m going to put my money in talent” (Combs, et al., 2013, p 7). In 2010 alone, McDonald’s opened a new campus in China in order to service one of its fastest growing markets. With the growth and expansion of McDonald’s throughout the world, adding positions to support that growth is not unreasonable. The addition of a few new positions at each campus, 14 in total, will ensure the successful of the program. Each successful graduate is another chance of a new owner that will open a restaurant and bring in new revenue for the company. The return on investment may not be immediate, but it will occur.

**Evaluation**

Evaluation will be based on two factors: student satisfaction and graduate progression. After completing research and a literature review on elements that will need to be evaluated, each student will be surveyed to determine their satisfaction with the services that were provided to them. The survey will be used to ascertain whether or not the student finds value in the use of service, whether or not the service rendered was as it was described, and how the services could improve. In addition to the survey, each student will have a career plan. This career plan will be developed in conjunction with the representatives after graduation from HU. Once the career plan is developed, the representatives will assign the student to a specific mentor to aid them in achieving their goals and the representative will be tasked with ensuring progression towards that goal. This would include furthering education, attaining promotions, or even completing life-long education courses. Students will be able to evaluate both their representatives and mentors. Hamburger University career services representatives will be evaluated based off of the achievement of students’ short and long-term goals. For example, if a graduate sets forth to become the general manager of a store within the next 3 years, the career services representative will be tasked with the completion of these goals. Achievement of these goals will be considered “placement rates,” and will ultimately be the most important measurement of the department’s success. Both qualitative and quantitative benchmarks will be important for the evaluation.

**Rationale for the Change**

Oftentimes there are employees that are not properly rewarded for their hard work. Especially in the food services industry, where there are not that many opportunities for advancement, hard workers can find themselves stuck in what they might consider a “dead-end job.” This is the rationale behind offering real opportunities of advancement to deserving employees through a Career Services department. Knowing that there is going to be return on their investment of going to Hamburger University, will not only increase learner satisfaction, but also increase learning outcomes, as students will be more motivated. Employees will work harder to earn a spot at the university and then work even harder once they get there.

According to Smith and Drago (2004), workplace-training goals address three types of learning: information transfer, skills development, and competency development. Workplace training should not stop there, it should continue with additional services that will motivate students to look towards the next level and work harder. This is not to say that trainers should be tasked with training, mentorship, and career services, as that is the job of many. Workplace trainers have five functions: “fostering an environment conducive to learning; working and learning with co-workers; structuring and shaping work processes to accommodate learning; promoting independence and self-direction in learners; linking external experiences with work and learning in the workplace” (Harris, et al., 2000, p 7). Career services representatives will be able to pick up where the trainer leaves off; seamlessly helping Hamburger University graduates apply their new knowledge and leadership skills to their career.

It is well known that “adult learners are seeking some form of *change* in their lives or that *change* has provoked them to engage in learning” (Morgan, 1995, p 1). There are certain changes that occur in students as outcomes of learning, which can be affected by effective student services. Such changes include “confidence and self-esteem; an awareness of self in society, a move towards ‘empowerment’; and a change in relation to social and domestic context” (Morgan, 1995, p3). In order to promote such change, a full learning experience is necessary. According to a study conducted to measure the job satisfaction of employees in Taiwan, there was a correlation between the satisfaction of employees and the career development programs available to them (Chen, et al, 2003).

**Conclusion**

McDonald’s has proven to be successful at educating their employees at one of the most popular corporate training institutions. It is difficult to critique an institution such as Hamburger University because of the nearly unlimited resources that the company possesses. Adding a career services department within a corporate training institution is a revolutionary idea but, if executed correctly, can propel the company to new heights with an overwhelming amount of highly developed talent.

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