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As Seneca Niagara Casino prepared in the spring of 2003 to open its first fine dining restaurant, The Western Door Steakhouse, the Food and Beverage Department elected to retain the consulting services of John Bourdage of Social Edge Seminars to round out the training program for all front of the house staff.

Etiquette training was something new to the training program at Seneca Niagara Casino, but we felt it was important to open our beautiful steakhouse with not just elegant and comfortable ambiance supplied by the designers, but to give our guests an over the top customer service experience uniquely different from other fine dining establishments in Western New York.

John worked closely with our newly hired staff, both as a group and one on one, as they progressed through over 80 hours of pre-opening training. In addition to learning the mechanics of the operation, they were also coached on the proper way to approach the table, how to turn the most adverse conditions into an enjoyable experience for the guests, and how to build their individual “businesses” by remembering likes and dislikes of returning clientele.

From the day it opened in May of 2003, The Western Door Steakhouse was an immediate success. Its popularity has grown to such an extent that most customers understand that if they wish to dine in the steakhouse, it’s usually necessary to reserve a table two weeks in advance – even on weekdays! Most importantly, the reason people keep returning is because of the service. It is also important to note that the attrition rate in The Western Door Steakhouse is almost none. The employees were well trained from the start, and all benefited from the smooth opening that resulted from their preparation. Social Edge Seminars played a large role in their preparation.

When the Seneca Niagara Food and Beverage Department began to prepare for the opening of the hotel, the task at hand was gigantic: plans included the openings of a fine dining Italian restaurant, fine dining Asian restaurant, a 24 hour restaurant, a nightclub, six new bars, a gourmet snack bar, room service for 604 rooms, and butler service for ten

penthouse suites. With the monumental task of training over 400 new employees, John Bourdage was again contacted to participate in the training of all front of house employees for Food and Beverage.

The first week of training for all new hires included lecture seminars by Mr. Bourdage which were conducted in a theater setting. After the initial etiquette orientation, each new department, from nightclub cocktail servers to penthouse butlers, spent time working under the tutelage of John Bourdage. John worked tirelessly with each department, paying special attention to role playing and play dates planned for 3 days prior to each opening.

It should also be noted that the opening of the new F & B departments were timed as such that there were usually only a few days between the openings of each restaurant, with room service and the nightclub both opening on the same day.

This week marks the one year anniversary of the first openings of the new Food and Beverage departments within the new Seneca Niagara Casino and Hotel. Business is strong, and I'm happy to say operations are smooth. The Western Door Steakhouse is still a success, with the now common crowd of people outside the gates every day at 5pm when it opens its doors.

Without hesitation, I would recommend the consulting services of John Bourdage to any corporation or small business owner looking to open a new restaurant or restaurants. Social Edge is also perfect for training of all departments of hotel services, for any employer looking to fine tune guest services. The gracious touch of memorable customer service is worth its weight in gold.

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