

case study



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

Café Spice Namasté



Background

Size:	32 people
Sector:	Restaurant
Location:	London
Status:	First achieved Investors in People recognition in 1999; awarded Investor in People Champion status in 2005

The organisation

Café Spice Namasté is a small but expanding restaurant group specialising in Indian and pan-Asian cuisine of the highest standard. It was established to redefine the flavours, decor and service associated with restaurants serving food from the Subcontinent.

Cyrus Todiwala and Michael Gottlieb originally conceived their flagship restaurant ten years ago. Namasté, which means a 'warm welcome' in Hindi, defines the principle and philosophy on which the company is based.

As well as running Café Spice Namasté, co-founder Cyrus consults for the Tesco Finest range, and manages his two other restaurants - The Parsee in Highgate and Cafe T in New Cavendish Street- and provides sandwiches and snacks to various outlets. His pickles and chutneys are available at Harvey Nichols and at his flagship City restaurant.

- **Almost zero percent turnover rate**
- **Since achieving the Standard the partners have entered into two new ventures**
- **Won several industry accolades.**

“There is no doubt that Investors in People has helped us to get to where we are. Our business has survived in a very competitive environment having Investors in People ingrained in our culture helps to underpin our success.”

Cyrus Todiwala, MBE, Proprietor and Executive Chef



The challenge

Café Spice Namasté already had a clear policy of investing in its people when it was urged to apply for Investors in People recognition.

“The restaurant industry is notorious for not training beyond induction, and for giving excuses to justify this behaviour,” says Cyrus.

“70 per cent of our team are not formally educated and from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds,” he explains. “Flare-ups are frequent, there are communal differences, language barriers and historical distrust to deal with, all of which call for different communication methods.

“Because of the nature of the business there was rarely the opportunity for all staff to be involved in decision-making. By going for accreditation, however, we would be able to apply some structure to the processes as well as demonstrate our commitment to best practice to our staff,” Cyrus adds.

The employees warmed to the idea of working towards being a recognised Investors in People organisation. It was also felt that working with the Standard would enable and inspire the business to be continuously positive and proactive.

“It is easy to become complacent,” Cyrus continues. “The Standard, we felt, and its reassessment process, would keep challenging us and our business to stay sharp.”

The strategy

Cyrus has always been particularly proud of the importance placed on the general attitude to employees. The culture has been nurtured so that excellence is pursued at every level. The company invests a lot of time in its people with initiatives such as NVQ training, English language lessons and a structured training programme in order to create a competence-based approach to progress.

“Everyone works to a set training plan profiled against the needs of the business. Employees undertake English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and craft skills courses and have also undergone Dale Carnegie programmes that have helped to engender confidence,” says Cyrus.

The business consciously and continuously invests in its people, using formal and informal strategies, and on and off the job training. International and national trade fairs and shows for example are seen as an opportunity for employees to demonstrate their customer service and product knowledge skills.

Staff meetings, appraisals, coaching and mentoring sessions are also used to foster open dialogue with managers and employees.

As Café Spice Namasté is a family business, everyone has an emotional stake in its success. It continuously introduces and implements new policies that demonstrate to its people that it values their welfare. For example, the company adheres to a strict policy of recycling and renewing the environment, and managers continue to introduce new systems such as remote temperature monitoring for safety.

As part of the culture of continuous learning and reward, employees are given pay increases on merit and their ideas are supported and shared. People are encouraged to introduce their own creations in the kitchen or bar and are recognised when their suggestions are used.

The results

Since achieving the Standard the partners have entered into two new ventures. Launched two years ago, the sandwich and outdoor catering as well as the culinary masterclass and chef demonstration business are all growing and enjoying a spell of healthy expansion.

“Investors in People has helped us consolidate the commitment of an already loyal and happy staff and contribute to the further development of a friendly, welcoming and supportive culture,” says Cyrus. “During the latest review all interviewees without exception said they believed the company was genuinely committed to their development.”

“Employees are continuously consulted, advised and supported, even through personal hardships. My wife and I lead by example and never forget to thank and praise the team,” says Cyrus. “This doesn’t mean that we don’t have absenteeism sometimes for a variety of reasons, but it means that we have an almost zero per cent turnover rate.”

“We have very low, if no staff turnover, and managers continue to listen and communicate with staff at weekly business review meetings,” he adds. “We - the owners, managers and staff - have all been kept aware of our responsibilities as a result of the Standard.”

Moreover Café Spice Namasté has won several industry accolades including Menu Magazine’s Best in Britain (BIBA) Awards for Best Indian Restaurant in the UK. It was also recently recognised in the ITV London Restaurant Awards for ‘Most Outstanding Contribution to London Restaurants’. It is among the top 50 restaurants in the ethnic food sector and features in all the quality guides including Square Meal, Time Out, The London Restaurant Guide, Frommers, Hardens and Tatler.

