

## CHAPTER 3

### The Business Improvement Project

#### 3.1 Situational Analysis

Since our previous chef left at the end of summer 1 (march 2009), Sky Lounge restaurant and the students doing their on-site training were basically left without supervision. As there is no full time manager/faculty assigned to manage the restaurant, a lot of responsibility is given to Ms. Siriwan, a 28y old Thai female with no former training or education in the hospitality field. Originally her job was just to cook Thai food and to maintain the kitchen. Later on she also became responsible for the linen, ordering and purchasing of supplies and the revenue collection. As she has no former education, training or experience, it is a real challenge for her to manage the kitchen and her other duties.

#### 3.2 Problem Statement

When I started my assignment to manage the restaurant I was faced with disorder. I discovered an unprofessional and unorganized restaurant with no supervision. I also noticed slow and poor service by unmotivated students who had no service/cooking skills. The current situation required for immediate action to fix symptoms and to think about a long term strategy. It was clear that I had to improve operational processes and improve student's skills, knowledge and attitudes in the short term.

I also had to think about a long term strategy because I would only be there for a couple of months. In conclusion, there were 4 main areas that needed immediate improvement: service, staffing, sales and the student's skills, knowledge and attitudes.

Although the Ishiwaka diagram might not seem an obvious management tool to analyze the problems of a restaurant, I found it very useful to brainstorm about the different causes that lead to an unprofessional food service.

### Fishbone Diagram of Sky Lounge

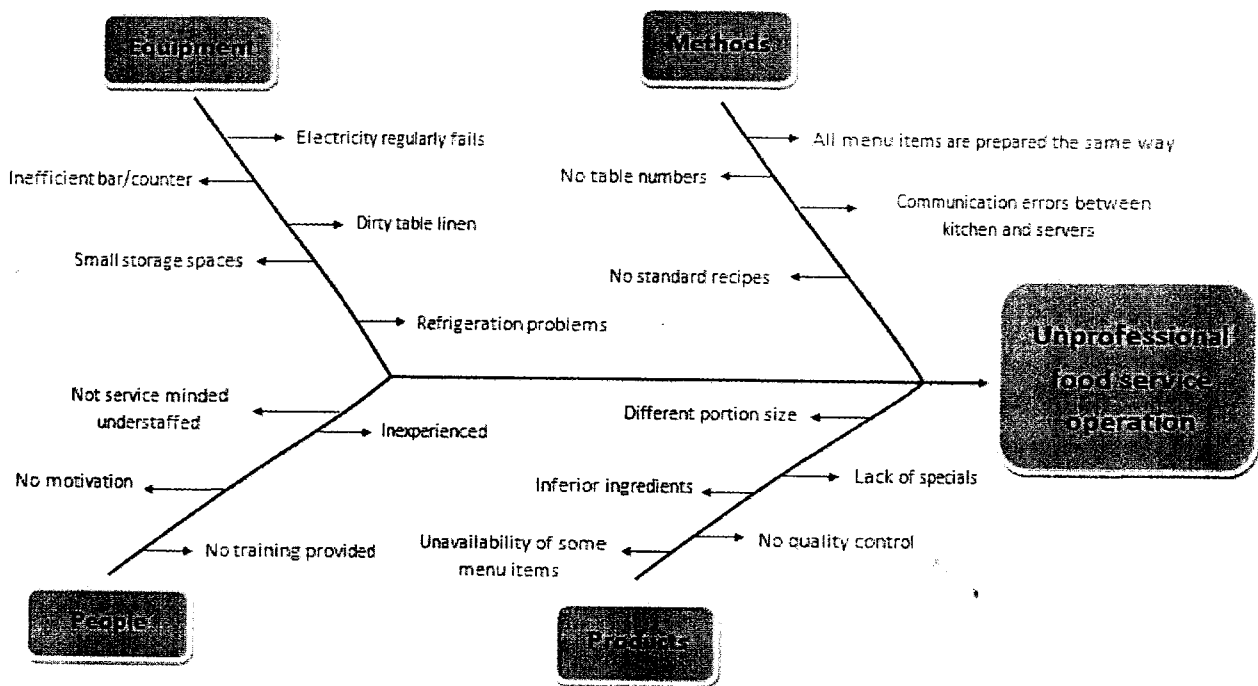


Figure 3.1: Ishikawa diagram indicating the causes of an unprofessional foodservice operation

Figure 3.1 shows that there are different causes leading to an unprofessional food service operation. The factor people and methods were the strongest causes followed by products. In my decision analysis I will mainly focus on the first two factors.

### 3.3 Literature Review

The concepts of profession, professional, and professionalism have varied meanings, interpretations, and usage. Originally only applied to the fields of divinity, law and medicine, the concepts now have broad application including the to the field of hospitality management (*Larson, 1977*)

Authors such as Perdue, Ninemeier, and Woods (2000), Kay and Rusette (2000) have reported that professionalism is a required competency for managers in the hospitality industry.

Dictionary definitions suggest that a profession is the body of people in a learned occupation; requiring considerable training and specialized study. Professionalism is defined as the methods, character, status, etc... of a professional. Also as professionalism, the expertness characteristic of a professional person. The combination of all the qualities that are connected with trained and skilled people. (*Collins English Dictionary, 2003; The American Heritage, 2009; Wordnet, 2008; Cambridge University Press, 2009*).

Performed analysis of requirements of different professional associations  
Voronova and Gaida signed out the main components of professional capacity of  
specialists of given professions.

Having used the given components –professional associations assess  
professional competence of applicants to their membership. There are 6 such  
elements: knowledge, competence and skills, ethics, experience, activities (actions)  
and mental capacity see Figure 3.2<sup>1</sup> (*Voronova and Gaida date n/a*)

Most hospitality programs have field work in one form or another. Whether  
they are called practicum, internship, or co-op, the experiences share the  
commonality as the essential field education of students in the fine art and science of  
hospitality management. There are however, certain elements of quality present in  
all successful field experience programs. These components of commitment,  
partnership with industry and the triangular involvement of student, faculty and  
property management are available to all field experiences. (*Pauzé, Johnson and  
Miller, 1989*)

There is little question that a combination of on-the-job training and  
classroom learning is the most effective way to prepare future managers for  
productive careers in the hospitality industry. A program that integrates the work  
requirement with an academic program, cooperative education, allows for greater  
control of the work experience, maximizing the benefit of the student. (*Downey,  
1979*)

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A

The hospitality industry sorely needs knowledgeable, experienced individuals to enter its management ranks, but even the graduates of four-year hospitality education programs often lack practical experience in the field. As a result, many employers require that college graduates spend months in training programs, which new hires resent after they have completed four years of formal education. (*Downey, 1979*)

Every bright student nowadays may have a college degree, but not all students have experience in the working world. Most prospective employers want to see work experience (*Davis, Moore, 1935*)

A major issue in hotel management education is ensuring the application of classroom learning experiences to actual management situations. (*LeBruto, Murray, 1994*)

Richard Wisch for instance found that students seeking quality undergraduate hotel management education expected a component of the curriculum to include practical experience. (*Wisch 1988*). Based on a survey of 29 educators, 20 trainers, and 183 trainees, John Knight determined that educational institutions in hotel-management should expand their use of on-the-job training experiences to develop tomorrow's hospitality managers. (*Knight 1984*). Moreover, Don Cook confirmed the common sense principle that such learning experiences should be responsive to the industry demands. (*Cook 1988*).

He further asserted that this education should include both training opportunities and adequate facilities for this education to be responsive to the industry. (*Cook 1988*).

The university student is rewarded for individual performance, not for teamwork. In short, college teaches students to assume the role of the “selfish genius.” As a result, when graduates enter the work world, they often have difficulty adapting to situations that require group cooperation. (*Berger, Berger 1983*)

At the college and university level hospitality educators need to challenge their students to learn. Too often, students get grades that they have not earned. They are rewarded for less than full effort and have to come to believe that the level of effort given in school will be sufficient in the workplace. (*Pavesic 1993*)

The only way hospitality programs can assess their effectiveness is through the legacies of their graduates. If alumni are successful in their chosen careers, then we can assume that they were adequately prepared by their education. Unquestionably, higher standards will improve the quality of the educational experience. (*Pavesic 1993*)

Because the task of food service management is intensely interpersonal in nature and high in dynamic complexity, it requires learning at a level where the learner can connect the learned material with external, situational applications (*Gist 1997*)

Gist (1997) also recommends connection the learning material with external, situational applications through behavioral practice. Such practice situations are provided by some types of experiential learning situations. Furthermore authors such as Little state that experiential learning programs provide students with the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge, and to experience situations not easily communicated through traditional classroom instruction (*Little, 1981*)

### 3.4 Problem Analysis

#### *3.4.1 Problem analysis of the service process*

During my observations I noticed that there was no formal service process. The server would take the food and beverage order, give a copy to the cashier and one to the kitchen. When the food was ready the server would walk up to the cashier and ask where the food was for. The cashier would then mention the name of the guest (if he or she knew the person) or point at a certain table. This system causes several problems; (1) wrong food delivery, (2) it slows down the food service, (3) it decreases food quality, (4) it looks unprofessional and (5) it puts too much stress on the cashier. See Figure 3.3

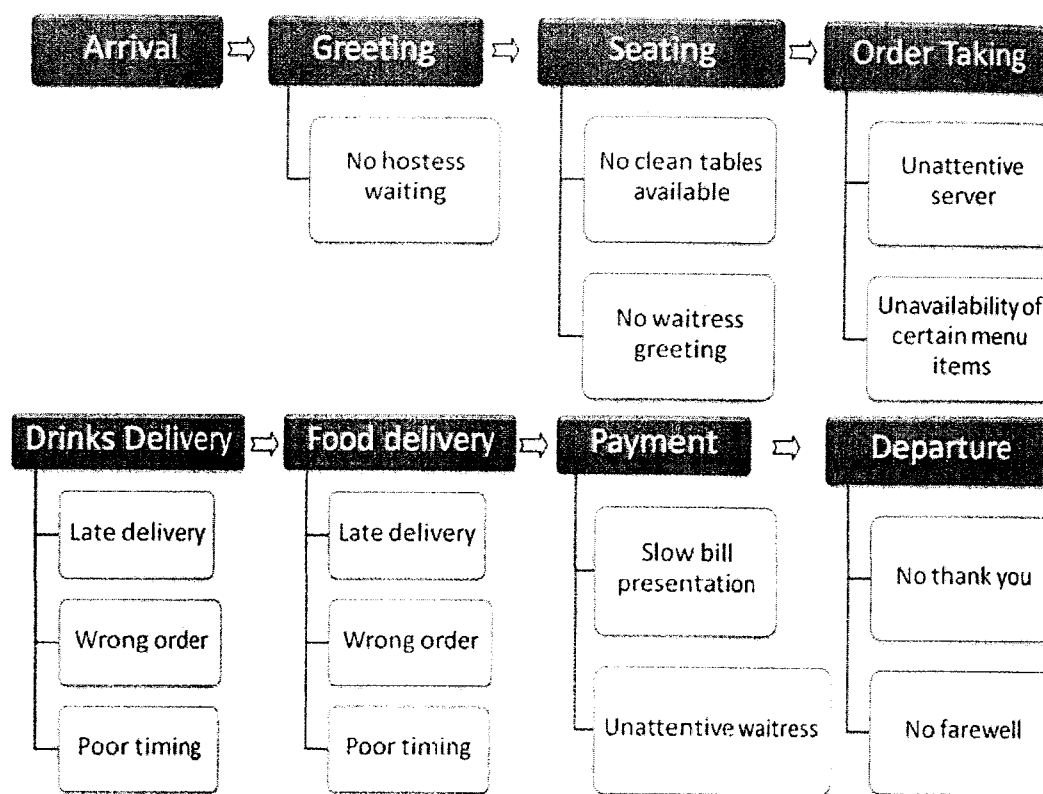


Figure 3.3 Problem analysis of the service process

### 3.4.2 Problem analysis of staffing

During my observations I noticed that there were no proper positions assigned to the different students working in the restaurant. Everybody would just help out where necessary.

This system causes several problems; (1) Some stations would be understaffed whilst other stations would be overcrowded. (2) Students would have no idea what to do and where they should work during their shift. Another major problem I noticed was that on some days the restaurant was understaffed because the lack of proper scheduling.

This also causes several problems; (1) slow and inefficient service, (2) too much pressure on the few students on duty.

#### *3.4.3 Problem analysis of sales*

During an interviewing Ms. Siriwan it became clear that she felt that there was much more food going out of the kitchen than there was revenue coming in. Examination of the revenue and expenses statements showed that some days the restaurant would hardly reach break- even. This was a crucial issue, if the restaurant would continuously operate at a loss, it would be very difficult to keep the restaurant operational, let alone buy new equipment. The first step was to identify the causes of this problem. I found that there was (1) a lack of sales control, (2) customers would leave without paying, especially the ones who were seated in the outdoor seating area. (3) students on duty felt that they 'deserved' to eat and drink for free, (4) some students –who were not on duty- preferred to cook food by themselves and prepared huge portions. (5) students would order and pay for 2 bottles of water and then take 4 out of the fridge by themselves.

#### *3.4.4 Problem analysis of students' skills, knowledge and attitude*

I noticed that students lacked the necessary skills to provide an acceptable level of service. There was a lack of both technical and social skills so I decided to develop a research project to find out what the underlying reasons were for the lack of skills. A self administered questionnaire was distributed to 45 students.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B

The questionnaire was divided into 4 different parts: part 1: student's personal details, part 2: student's experience, part 3: student's perception of skills learned, part 4: how can the internship experience be improved.

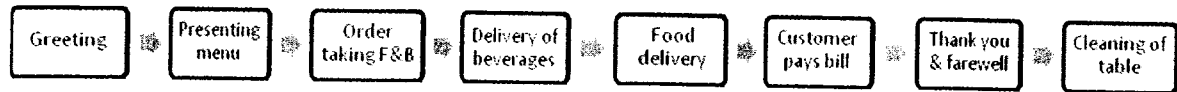
About 84% of the respondents were female students (84%), the majority of the students were Thai (87%). Most of the interviewed students were second year students (66,7%), followed by fourth year students (24,4%). Almost all students had ever worked in Sky Lounge before (91.9%). When asked about what training lab have you taken, most of the students have taken flower arrangement (73.3%) and service lab (73.3%). In contrast, only 55.6% had taken Thai food lab. This is a remarkable result because students who take on-site internship have to work in the kitchen and are supposed to be able to cook Thai food. Although 63.4% of the students are able to cook more than 3 Thai dishes, 14,6% can cook 1 – 2 dishes and 22% cannot cook anything at all. Students pointed out that one of the reasons for the lack of motivation is the inconsistent record keeping by the International Program of worked hours (25%).

### 3.5 Decision analysis

#### *3.5.1 Decision analysis of the service process*

Service should happen in an organized way by simply making use of table numbers. I've assigned table numbers to each table, making the service more efficient. When customers order food and are seated outside of the restaurant they will receive a letter which they have to take with them to their table so when a server

walks out of the restaurant and immediately he or she can identify where the food is for. Secondly I've established standard procedures for the service which can be found in Figure 3.4



*Figure 3.4 Sequence of the service process*

### *3.5.2 Decision analysis of staffing*

The first thing I have done here is establishing a minimum amount of students who are necessary to operate the restaurant that guarantees a proper level of service. The restaurant serves around 30 covers at its busiest time, which is during the 2<sup>nd</sup> shift, from 11.15 – 13.45. From my observations and my experience I have decided that there should always be a minimum of 4 people on duty in the restaurant. There should be 1 cashier, 1 bartender, and 2 servers. The kitchen should always be staffed with 1 dishwasher and 2 cooks to assist Ms. Siriwan.

Secondly I have designed a proper schedule with all the names of the students who are on duty and their role for that day.<sup>3</sup> This system has the advantage that there is no room for miscommunication about who was supposed to be on service and on what station. It also showed where additional staff was required. The schedule was put up in two different locations, in front of the office and in the restaurant so students could always verify when they had to be on duty.

Thirdly I have created detailed job descriptions for each position. These job descriptions clearly indicate what is expected from each position. I have also created

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix D

opening and closing checklists for the restaurant. This helps students during opening and closing time when there is no supervisor to give direct orders.<sup>4</sup>

### *3.5.3. Decision analysis of sales*

I have established a new set of Sky Lounge policies. The first objective here was to develop a tighter sales control. From now on customers have to pay immediately upon placing the order. The cashier will write "PAID" on the order form and deliver it to the kitchen. The cooks are instructed not to prepare food for order forms that are not paid for. Another important change increasing sales control is that students who are not on duty are not allowed in the kitchen nor behind the counter.

### *3.5.4 Decision analysis of students' skills, knowledge and attitudes*

The first thing I have done is the creation of special training programs in different fields. I have chosen 5 topics which should guarantee an acceptable level of service, improve student's skills, knowledge and attitudes. Moreover these training programs should also prepare students for their out-side internship and future career.

#### *3.5.4.1 Development of training programs*

I have developed 5 training programs which should improve students' skills, knowledge and attitudes. It's a balanced mix between technical skills and social skills.

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix D

➤ Training program 1: Service skills

A focus on technical skills, student's are trained in table set up and table service, order taking and cashiering.

➤ Training program 2: Beverage preparation

Students are trained in hot and cold beverage preparation

➤ Training program 3: Suggestive selling and handling customer complaints

This is a focus on social skills and problem solving ability. Students will learn the different steps how to suggest a menu item and also learn the different steps in handling customer complaints. In my opinion it is crucial nowadays to be able to handle customer complaints, if a server is able to solve a problem in a way that satisfies the guest, the guest will most likely come back. The skills are easily learned, students follow a certain process in handling a complaint to come to a WIN-WIN situation. These skills will certainly be used by students in their further career, no matter if they stay in the hospitality industry or not.

➤ Training program 4: Human Relations

In this training program I have focused on social and communication skills. Nowadays it's of the utmost importance that people possess interpersonal and communication skills. Even a chef nowadays is expected not just to cook but to mingle with the crowd. In many upscale restaurants the chef will even suggest food, explain the menu and even take the order. This training program will help students to use the appropriate language when socializing in different situations.

➤ Training program 5: Hygiene and sanitation

Thai students often lack the knowledge about the importance of hygiene. This training program will explain about the necessity of hygiene. It will cover topics such as food borne illness, cross contamination and how to avoid that food gets infected with bacteria. There was also time spend on current issues such as the H1N1 virus.

Lastly I have organized training sessions for Thai cooking with Ms. Siriwan. The objective was that every student should be able to cook 5 dishes. At the end of my internship students were tested on their abilities to cook.

*3.5.5 measurement of the outcome of the decisions taken*

After every student completed the training programs I have tried to measure the outcome by interviewing students and by creating a new survey. Lastly I have used a form of experiential learning.

*3.5.5.1 measurement by questionnaire*

When asked what have you learned from the different training labs students mentioned:

how to serve F&B in the correct sequence and how to handle plates
how to set up tables
more service minded and better professional attitude towards customers
how to talk with customers in a proper way
how to take orders

how to make beverages and how to serve them
how to operate cashier system
how to handle problems and complaints
appropriate manners and how to socialize
always to wear full uniform

*Table 3.5 Outcome of training labs*

Table 3.5 clearly indicates that the training programs were successful. Students learned both technical and social skills. Moreover their personal and professional attitude improved.

When asked how the International Program in Hotel and Tourism Management could improve student's skills, knowledge and attitudes student's answered:

Give them more training about personality
Let students practice when learning something
Should have a book to explain the ways of cooking, portioning of the ingredients for each type of food
Should have more educational act
Should have a manual for students
Should have a role play in class
Appointing a permanent Sky Lounge professor to take care and manage not only the restaurant but also the internship students

*Table 3.6 Outcome of how the International Program can improve according to students*

### *3.5.5.2 measurement by experiential learning*

The final way to measure the outcome of the on-site internship/training programs was the final assignment students had to complete.

➤ Objective of the final assignment

Students had to organize an event/banquet, the entire planning and development of the activity was student controlled. They had to appoint a general manager and 4 assistant managers, coordinate the various activities and assign work to team members.

➤ Purpose of the final assignment

Students had to show the use the following skills:

- Technical skills and conceptual thinking: students had to come up with a concept, suggested menu items, a menu price range.
- Marketing, communication, organization, research, service and cooking skills were all used.
- Analytical skills: students had to observe the event, explain the outcome and evaluate their actions and the feedback from the customers in a written report..

### *3.3.6 Other improvements made during the internship*

➤ Updated menu

Our menu urgently needed to be updated. Some menu items were not offered anymore and also the color and style were outdated. I've also added numbers to the different menu items. This was very helpful especially for international

students. As Miss Siriwan can't read English, all orders have to be written in Thai. This could not be done by foreign students, so quite often they had to ask the customer to write down his/her order.<sup>5</sup>

➤ Standard recipes

One of the problems for students in the kitchen was that there were no formal standard recipes available. This created inconsistency concerning portion size, used ingredients and taste. The standard recipes contain both the amount of the necessary ingredients and the preparation method.<sup>6</sup>

➤ Development of take-out service

Sky Lounge now also serves people outside of the restaurant. There is a telephone located near the cashier. The cashier will take the order and the servers will deliver the food.

➤ Creation of an internship record book

This book guarantees that all hours worked by the students are now properly recorded. An instructor will sign after each shift and accumulate the worked hours.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix E

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix F

### 3.6 Conclusions

Although there are different causes for the lack of professionalism in Sky Lounge, the main cause is the lack of supervision. My report has shown that with proper management the restaurant can be operated in a professional way. By creating a time schedule, standard procedures and job checklists students now have a clear idea what is expected from them. Moreover the understaffing problem has been solved. The establishment of new and stricter policies have resulted in a tighter sales control and more discipline. The use of specialized training programs is of the utmost importance and has proven to increase student's skills and knowledge. As stated earlier, a combination of on-the-job training and classroom learning is the most effective way to prepare future managers.

### 3.7 Recommendations

Clearly the International Program has to rethink the way it is operating Sky Lounge Restaurant. Sky Lounge restaurant needs a full time manager, not only to manage the restaurant but also to be responsible for the training of internship students. A full time manager could also set up a new on-site internship system that would guarantee that students take all different training labs. It would also guarantee that the newly established policies, standard procedures and other processes are continued. Furthermore it would also enhance the student's on-site internship experience and it would have an impact on the department's quality assurance. The manager should have the necessary skills and experience to ensure the continuous development of professionalism.

Secondly the International Program should continue to apply experiential learning, because it provides the students with skills and knowledge that cannot be taught in the classroom and it is an excellent opportunity for student's to demonstrate their abilities.

Finally the International Program should work closely together with the industry to ensure that we provide students with the required skills necessary for the ever changing needs of today's hospitality industry.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

#### 4.1 Personal benefits of the internship

My internship at Sky Lounge Restaurant reminded me about my time as a restaurant manager at Fré's Diner, a trendy fine-dining restaurant in Belgium and my time as a Hotel Management student. I felt really comfortable somehow being back "in the field" and my previous experience was very useful.

My internship also showed that managing a restaurant is mostly managing people. More than ever it is a people business and in my opinion people make the difference between an excellent and a mediocre restaurant. One of the keys to organizational success is the degree to which human resources are effectively managed (Hanson, 1986; Pfeffer, 1994). If people are well trained guests will have a better experience.

#### 4.2 Professional benefits of the internship

My time in Sky Lounge also made me think about my professional future. I realize more than ever that we –who are in education- are in a privileged position. We lead an easy and comfortable life with little or no stress at all compared to people in the hospitality industry. We literally have a 9 to 5 job and there are not many challenges facing us so I was very excited about this opportunity to develop professionalism in Sky Lounge. I was satisfied with the results and it was a

confirmation that I am able to manage a restaurant, to train and motivate people. The internship and the skills acquired during my MBA studies combined with my good grades sparked my critical thinking: "Am I ambitious enough?" "Isn't this job too easy for me, am I not getting too comfortable?" "Shouldn't I be looking for a new challenge?" I really enjoy being in education but I am convinced that I am not using my skills and qualities to the fullest.

#### 4.3 Benefits for Sky Lounge and the International Program

Sky Lounge is now professionally organized. Different processes have been set up and different procedures have been implemented. Training programs have been set up and other important improvements have been made. If the recommendations are followed Sky Lounge and the International Program will benefit even more in the future.