



# HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT CASE

PRESENTED BY

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# CRHA

Ordre des conseillers  
en ressources  
humaines agréés

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## **A summer at the hotel Le Cartésien**

The hotel *Le Cartésien* is located downtown Montreal near the city's entertainment district, an area popular with tourists and entertainers alike. It has an excellent reputation despite its status as an independent hotel. In fact, it is one of the few hotels in the city centre that isn't part of a large international chain and that still manages to attract the "big guns of the music industry." The hotel is known for its customer service, excellent facilities, the discretion of its staff, and for respecting the privacy of public figures. In fact, it is patronized and recognized for the privacy it provides celebrities.

### **Staff**

The hotel's staff is made up of a limited but stable pool of regular employees, plus seasonal staff to handle the rush of clients attending summer festivals and events in Montreal. The work environment is congenial; the hotel's management has worked there for quite some time and has built up a relationship of trust with the regular employees. All the non-management staff is unionized and subject to a 45-day trial period. Some of the working conditions are fairly restrictive. For example, no vacations are allowed in July or August, but because the employees are proud to represent a first-rate hotel, they accept this restriction.

The average age of regular employees is 48, compared to about age 20 for the seasonal staff. The majority of the workforce is female, while the supervisory staff is primarily male. Most of the seasonal employees are students in hotel management.

The working atmosphere among the regular employees is quite good. However, the considerable age gap between the regular and seasonal employees can sometimes cause friction. There may often be a lack of unity and employees may separate into two different groups at social activities or in the staff lounge.

The turnover of regular employees is low; most have been working at the hotel for over four years. The situation for seasonal employees is more critical. Students start work on May 1, but the date of termination of their employment is indefinite. In reality, after the end of the Labour Day weekend in September, they are offered fewer hours because the hotel doesn't need them as much. The students often end up resigning in October because they haven't had any work for several weeks. This happens every year. In fact, only 25% of seasonal employees return the following summer. Hiring seasonal staff requires many hours of training and adjustment, which in turn calls for an investment in time and money by the hotel management. When planning the summer season, recruitment is a key issue.

### **Reception and information team**

Mark has worked at the hotel for 22 years. Like most of the other managers, he hasn't had any human resources training. He acts according to his best judgment. He has managed the hotel's reception and information desk for some 10 years now. He is appreciated by the hotel's regular clients and is very discreet. His superiors also value his work. Mark is well integrated into the team and lives with Annie, one of the hotel restaurant managers. They don't have the same schedule; Mark works days (from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.) and Annie works evenings (from 3 to 11 p.m.), which means that Mark comes back to the hotel in the evening.

Every summer, Mark's team increases substantially. He trains new employees as a group, emphasizing that respect and confidentiality are crucial for celebrity clients. He adapts his training to the needs and questions of his recruits. No documents on confidentiality or other issues are available to serve as guidelines for the members of his team. However, Mark is available to answer questions by phone even outside his

working hours. He also takes advantage of his return at the end of the evening to make sure the reception desk is running smoothly.

Sarah is 18 years old and this is her first job in the hotel industry. She started work on May 1. She is very proud to be part of the reception team of the prestigious hotel *Le Cartésien*. She loves working with the clients and is excited by the idea of meeting celebrities from the music world. She's aware that she has to keep information confidential, but she has secret Instagram and Facebook accounts where she knows that photos of her favourite stars will be safe. A few of her classmates have also joined Mark's team and they've promised each other to share the latest gossip about the rich and famous.

### **Use of cell phones**

Mark has noticed that Sarah's cell phone is often close at hand when she's working at the reception desk. This bothers him, but he tells himself that as long as she's not using it, it isn't a problem. He notes that other staff members also have their cell phones nearby in other areas of the hotel (room service, gym, restaurant). Sarah secretly posts photos and gossip about the stars, as do some of her co-workers, who share with her on various social media.

On a particularly busy day, Mark asks Sarah to stop using her cell phone and to put it in her locker because he thinks it's not professional. Sarah, who works evenings (from 3 to 11 p.m.), waits until Mark leaves and then retrieves her cell phone because she's waiting for important information about plans for later that night. Mark comes back to pick up Annie around 10:45 and drops by the reception desk, where he notices that Sarah is texting again. Once more, he politely tells her to put her cell phone away.

Mark keeps a close eye on the situation over several shifts and decides to step up his surveillance of Sarah's use of her cell phone. There's no official code of conduct for the

use of cell phones in the workplace but the employees are aware of the importance of professionalism and discretion.

Somewhat annoyed, Mark is a bit short with Sarah. Sarah sees that a number of her co-workers are also using their cell phones, and getting away with it. In early August, she decides to post something on her secret account, mentioning that “*the old bosses at the hotel Le Cartésien don’t know how to adapt to the young people who are drumming up publicity for them.*” Her post goes viral and clients get in touch with the hotel about the lack of professionalism. To the concern of the management team, the employees’ secret accounts (with the photos and gossip) are discovered.

### **The complaint**

The next morning, Sarah files a complaint with human resources because she feels that Mark’s treatment of her is unjustified and unfair in relation that of her co-workers. A number of seasonal employees take her side, claiming that the regular staff hasn’t adapted to the new realities. The work environment deteriorates and the staff breaks into two camps: the *old regular employees* and the *young seasonal ones*. Several of Sarah’s allies say they don’t want to come back next summer because the management team doesn’t understand their needs.

The same day, a number of reservations are cancelled because of the breaches of privacy noted on diverse social media.

### **Your mandate**

The hotel management calls on the human resources team of which you are a member. It asks you to identify the current problems in the hotel and prepare a list of the elements to be improved. It wants you to draw up a priority list of short-, medium- and long-term solutions. The hotel's CEO has a very poor opinion of human resources since the problem has degenerated and he's thinking about getting rid of the HR coordinator and doing the job himself. What should you do?