While the term ‘Journey to Excellence’ could well be a watchword for any of the initiatives taken by The Hong Kong Jockey Club over recent years in its quest to achieve ever-higher, world-leading standards, it has a special significance in Membership Services Division, where it defines a programme of evaluation and training activities specifically designed to take the Club’s membership and catering service quality to unprecedented levels.

Introduced in 2001, the Journey to Excellence programme sets out to achieve a whole new mindset and culture within the division, so that the Club boasts service standards that can be benchmarked against the very best in the industry.

The ongoing programme includes data collection – measuring the gap between employees’ perceptions of the Club’s services and those of outside observers – the defining of service standards, service excellence training, the development of in-house trainers, a certification programme and, in its latest phase, a leadership programme.

Executive Director of Membership Services, Billy Chen is anxious to emphasise that the Journey to Excellence goes beyond merely upgrading service standards. “It’s an ongoing change in culture,” he observes. “It makes the adoption of new ideas much easier and it helps us build more cohesiveness in the working relationships between different teams.”

The programme, Mr Chen notes, is not confined to front-of-house services but also embraces procurement, receiving, engineering and even functions like dishwashing. “When a Member comes into one of our Clubhouses, it actually requires at least six or seven people to service him, in the front line and behind the scenes,” he points out.

“There are many different aspects to our Journey to Excellence but they all come down to one major objective: how do we proactively serve our Members best? It’s all about cultivating staff to think in a different way and rewarding them when they delight a customer.”

Head of Hospitality Services Fritz Sommerau adds that the Journey to Excellence is no ordinary travel adventure. “It’s not a journey from A to B but a journey without a finish, because you have to keep on getting better all the time, even to stay where you are,” he observes. “Standards that were making a competitive difference three years ago may now be only the norm. It’s a never-ending challenge – but it’s one that our staff have really taken to heart.

“We started with the premise that ‘We are good, but how can we be better?’,” he explains. “We asked the staff to give their own ratings of our services and then asked an external party – not our Members, but an experienced independent organisation – to do the same thing. It surprised a few people to discover how much wider the gap was than they realised.”

For all the importance attached to Journey to Excellence, though, it’s only one part of the Club’s drive to offer its Members continuous improvements in facilities and services over the past decade.
Spearheading Membership Services Division’s quest for excellence are (from left) Head of Membership Services Rowena Lam, Head of Hospitality Services Fritz Sommerau and Executive Director of Membership Services Billy Chen.
Rolling programme

Since 1992 when the new Happy Valley Clubhouse set a benchmark, Membership Services has adopted a continuous rolling programme of upgrading its other clubhouse and racecourse catering facilities, to ensure that they all come up to the same ‘best in class’ standard.

From the refurbishment of the Ladies Purse coffee shop at Sha Tin Clubhouse in 1995 to the restyling of The Derby Restaurant and Bar at Happy Valley Clubhouse in 2003 and the recruitment of internationally renowned chef Donovan Cooke, each of the upgrades has raised the bar a little higher and ensured that the Club maintains its reputation for quality and prestige.

Some of the changes have also been aimed at reaching out to new segments of the Membership and widening the range of services offered to them; for example, the renovation of the chalets at Beas River Country Club in 2004 has sparked a new wave of popularity for this venue as a weekend family retreat, while the doubling in size of the gym at Happy Valley Clubhouse, along with other upgrades to the sports facilities, have proved a strong draw among younger Members.

Another important means of adding value and prestige to Club Membership has been an expansion of the guest chef programme, under which top chefs and winemakers from around the world are invited to come and demonstrate their skills in the Club restaurants. “This gives our Members the opportunity to sample the world’s finest food and wines without having to step on a plane, and at a fraction of the normal cost,” enthuses Mr Sommerau. “In fact in some cases, like our now annual visits by chefs from the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, it’s something they couldn’t even do on their own. At the same time, it provides a very valuable learning experience for our staff.”

More personalised

The latest enhancement to Membership Services has been the progressive implementation over the past 18 months of a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, designed to ensure that Members can be offered more efficient and more personalised services than ever.

“Not only do we now have a centralised reservation system for all our different catering outlets and sports facilities, we can also keep a log of Members’ individual preferences,” explains Rowena Lam, Head of Membership Services. “So for example, when a Member makes a restaurant booking, we can ensure that he gets his favourite table without his even having to ask. Our staff can also be well prepared to greet him by name and suggest the wines and foods that we know he likes best, which adds a very personal touch. It’s another good example of what we’re trying to achieve under the Journey to Excellence programme.”

As well as centralising Member bookings and information,
the CRM encompasses back-office systems such as staff deployment, usage tracking of facilities, property maintenance and catering operations management, all previously controlled by disparate computer systems and now integrated for greater operational efficiency. The CRM can be used for targeted marketing promotions, too.

Mr Chen stresses, though, that the CRM is not just a piece of sophisticated software. "It’s not about what it can do, but how we use that information to get a 360-degree view of our Members,” he points out. “It helps us add the ‘wow’ factor to our customers’ experience and ensures that we can always delight them. This, in turn, helps us gain their long-term loyalty.”

With the CRM now fully implemented, Mr Chen and his team are looking ahead to further ways of enhancing the breadth and depth of the services offered to Club Members. Foremost among these is the opening of a new Clubhouse in Beijing which will not only break new ground from a geographical perspective, extending the Club’s services outside Hong Kong for the first time, but will also be a ‘full service’ facility offering accommodation.
Keeping it in the family

Venues that offer memorable and personalised services tend to engender special kinds of loyalty, which may explain why many of the Club’s Members can trace their family connections back two generations or more.

Fergus Fung is a good example, having made his first visit to the Happy Valley Clubhouse with his parents at age three, when it was still at the racetrack. Now a Member in his own right, he is one of the “Derby Roomers”, an informal group of some 12 to 15 young business professionals who meet up two or three times a year for a dinner celebration at the new Clubhouse’s signature restaurant, The Derby.

“We gathered a group of friends together to try out The Derby when Donovan Cooke first became chef-de-cuisine in 2004,” Fergus recalls, “and we all enjoyed it so much that we decided we’d like do it on a regular basis.”

While The Derby is a great place for special occasions, he adds, the Parade and Paddock food plaza is another personal favourite and he also books the Chater Room for private functions from time to time, as well as heading for Beas River at weekends. “All the facilities are good, and I’ve seen all the services steadily upgraded over the years. For example, the gym here was a big improvement on the one at the old racetrack clubhouse, and it’s been further enhanced since.”

Fergus also looks on the Club as a place to bring his own next generation – which is not in the offering yet, though he’s holding part of his wedding celebrations there in September!

Even if his family do indeed become third-generation Members in the future, they’ll have some catching up to do on Li Fook-wo, who has been a Member himself since 1932, and whose father and uncles were active Owners many years before that. “In those days a spectacular annual race meeting was held in the first month of the Lunar New Year, lasting five days,” he recalls. “There was a carnival atmosphere and children were allowed to enter the racecourse on the final day.”

One of Mr Li’s fondest childhood memories is helping his two younger brothers lead in his father’s horse when it won the Derby at one such annual meeting, a scene that could hardly be imagined in Hong Kong today. But his own son Aubrey is nowadays a Voting Member and together they own the griffin Moonglow – so father and son have high hopes of leading a winner in together before too long.

Fernando Chan, General Manager

Fernando Chan, General Manager

Ready to differentiate

In the meantime, other plans are afoot to make further enhancements to the existing Happy Valley and Sha Tin Clubhouses, but looking at them from a complementary rather than competing perspective. “In the past, as most Members have a geographical preference for one Clubhouse or the other, we’ve tried to make sure that they each offer comparable facilities,” Mr Chen explains. “That’s still important, but we feel there are also opportunities to differentiate them and provide a wider range of services overall, especially as some facilities are under-utilised at present.”

Mr Chen is particularly keen to introduce more educational, sporting and cultural activities including performing arts, music rooms, language laboratories and even cyberstations. “We want to encourage more ‘bonding’ and family activity among Members, as a way of encouraging the next generation,” he says. “If the children grow up with the Club as part of their lives, they’ll want to join themselves when they become working adults.

It’s really just another aspect of our ongoing Journey to Excellence and our continued efforts to strengthen relationships with our customers. Our simple aim is to be the No.1 membership club in Asia. We’re not perfect yet, but I do believe that we’re getting there.”
於力前争程上万游里

二〇〇一年推出的「卓越之旅」，目标是全面提升会员服务处的思维和文化，令马会的服务水平能与业界翘楚并驾齐驱。

整个计划包括资料搜集，特别是员工与外界对于马会服务水平的不同看法，如何界定服务水平、提供卓越服务的培训、培育内部的导师、推出证书课程，并在最后阶段开展一个领袖课程。

会员事务执行总监陈锦程热切地强调：「『卓越之旅』不单只是提高服务水平。这个计划令整个企业文化不断改革，不但促使大家易於接受新主意，而且有别于各方面互相建立更紧密的合作关系。」

他表示计划并不限於前线服务，而且亦适用于采购、收货、工程，甚至於洗碗碟等工序。他指出：「每位进入会所的会员，至少需要六至七人的服务，包括前线及支援的员工。」

「『卓越之旅』包含许多环节，目的只有一个，就是我们如何主动为会员提供优质的服，以提升会员服务处的服务水平达到一个前所未有的更高水平。」

最佳的服，是培养员工改变其固有的思考方式，但在他们令客户感到称心满意时，加以奖励。」

会所及款客事务部主管宋茂落补充说，「卓越之旅」并不是一般的旅程。这个旅程不是由甲点去到乙点，这是一个没有尽头的万里前程，儘管你只停在原地，亦必须不断力求进步。简单说，三年前创出傲视同侪的超高水平，现在可能已变成业界的一般水平。这是一个永无止境的挑战，但我们的员工却必定竭尽所能，力争上游。」

宋茂落解释：「我们大的前提是：『我们已经做得很好，但如何可以做得更好？』於是，我们请员工给马会的服务评分，然後再请外界评分。『外界』不是马会会员，而是一间独立机构。结果显示，两者的差距也许一些人想像中大，确令他们十分惊讶。」

「卓越之旅」固然是一个重大计划，但在马会过去十年裏不断改善设施与服务的宏图大计之中，这只是其中一個环节。

持续计划

一九九二年，全新的跑马地会所啟用，标志着一个全新的基线。自此之后，会员事

務处展開了一个持续的计划，不断提升其

VIP visitors under last season’s guest chef and winemaker programme included French legend Philippe Etchebest (far left); Lo Choi cuisine experts from Shandong (bottom left) who shared their skills with Members; Baroness Philippe de Rothschild, owner of Chateau Mouton Rothschild (above), seen here with Club Chairman Ronald Arculli; and chefs from Palazzo Versace in Queensland and the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing.

「名家名厨献艺计划」邀请世界名厨及国内名厨会所献艺。

上一季名厨名厨包括(左上)法国国宝名厨 Philippe Etchebest；

(左下)来自山东的鲁菜大厨；(中)来自香港的港式点心师父；

(右)来自澳洲的澳洲谷物煎蛋卷。
Special sports and social events arranged each year for Members and their families include a golf tournament, children’s cookery classes and swimming training.

会员事務部主管林燕澄解釋：「我們不但設有中央的預訂系統，讓會員預訂餐飲服務和租用康體設施，還把各會員的個人喜好記錄下來。例如，有會員想訂來用餐，我們可以根據記錄知道他最喜歡哪張檯，於是不用等他開口提出，便可替他安排妥當。我們的職員也準備充足，以會員的姓氏專稱他們，向他們推介最合適的佳餚美酒，這些加添個人化服務的措施，就是我們要在『卓越之旅』計劃中達到的部份服務水平。」
Swiss experience leaves its mark

Leong Ngo-cham, sous chef at The Derby, the signature restaurant of Happy Valley Clubhouse, is among a number of Membership Services staff given the chance to broaden their experience through a temporary posting to a world-class overseas establishment – an opportunity that he found "really valuable".

"As well as learning a lot more about Western-style cooking methods, I gained a lot of useful tips and ideas about running a successful kitchen that I've been able to share with my colleagues and put into practice here in Hong Kong," Leong says.

Chef Leong's three-week posting in summer 2003 was to the renowned Die Fischerzunft hotel and restaurant in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, owned by the legendary André Jaeger who will be remembered by many older Hong Kong gourmets during his time at The Peninsula in the 1970s.

"Because of his long experience in Asia, André is considered one of the pioneers of fusion cuisine," Leong says. "Although his cooking methods are quite traditional, there are a lot of Chinese and Japanese influences in his dishes and he also uses a lot of fresh flowers for presentation."

One of the things that most stood out about Die Fischerzunft, Leong adds, was the rigorous attention to hygiene control and environmental protection. "They have very high standards in Switzerland because of the long years of training," he notes, citing the separation of waste into organic and non-organic products as an example that he has since adopted in his kitchen. "I've been able to pass on a lot of useful tips to my team and we always get very high marks in our hygiene inspections now."

Another notable feature was the calm atmosphere of the Swiss kitchen, with no-one rushing around or shouting at each other – "quite a contrast to the average Chinese restaurant," Leong says with a laugh. "I learned a lot about good communication and that's very important because The Derby is not just about top-class food but about style," he says, adding that he has also learned a great deal from The Derby's own chef-de-cuisine Donovan Cooke, another chef who has garnered an international reputation for his innovative menus. "We all have a very good understanding and communication between us, which helps ensure that we can always deliver high quality and meet our customers' expectations."

千載難逢的瑞士經驗

跑馬地會所打吡堂面主廚梁我潛對於有機會與會員
事務處的員工一同前往外國的著名餐飲實習，擴闊
視野及汲取經騐，他覺得這個機會實在難能可貴。

梁我潛說：「除了學到很多西式烹調方式，
我還在廚房管理和營運方面取得很多實用的小錦
囊和靈感，不但可與香港的同事分享，還可在香港
實踐。」

梁我潛在二○○三年夏天獲派到瑞士沙夫豪森
著名的酒店及餐廳Die Fischerzunft實習三個月。
該餐廳是由名廚André Jaeger主理，許多前輩食
家都會記得，他曾於七十年代任職香港半島酒店。

梁我潛說：「由於André具有豐富悠久的亞洲
經驗，所以獲得為中西合璧菜式的先鋒。他的烹
調方式十分傳統，但加入許多中國和日本的元
素，而且用了很多鮮花伴碟，風格別樹一幟。」

他續說，該餐廳出售的麥片之處，在於嚴格的衛
生和環保監控。他說：「瑞士的從業員都經過長
年訓練，所以水準都非常之高。」他現在在廚房實施
了部份從瑞士學到的新措施，包括把垃圾分為有
機和無機垃圾。「我已有很多實用的小貼士分享
的小組分享。現在我們在衛生檢查中常取得到高分
數呢！」

瑞士的廚房有另一個特點，就是氣氛平靜，沒
有人來來跑去或互相囑咐。他笑說：「這跟一般的
中菜廚房有天壤之別。」

他說：「我在學會了良好的溝通技巧。這是很重
要的，因為打吡餐廰不但供應一級美食，還提供
口味和風格。」他續說，他也從打吡餐廰學到主廚
講究賢身學了很多東西。講究賢也是一位國際
名廚，以創新的菜式譽滿天下。「我們都很了解對
方，餐廰溝通，確保時刻提供優質的服務，無愧客
人的期望。」