

DIESA: Immigration in a chain of restaurants in Manresa

DIESA is a Catalan organisation established in 1992. The organisation runs a chain of restaurants and cafes in the Barcelona area. Today they are running 28 restaurants with 300 employees, 140 of these are immigrants. Approximately 1/3 of the managers are of immigrant origin. (10-12 managers are immigrants)

Diego Sanchez Pulido the top manager tells that Spain has changed a lot the last years. Many Spaniards went abroad to get a job 10 years ago. Now it is different. Today it is very difficult to get enough employees that wish to work in restaurants. The organisations started therefore 7 years to recruit persons from other countries, especially from Romania and Bulgaria. This has proved to be a very positive experience.

When searching for employees abroad DIESA makes a profile of the person they would like to employ and the competences required. This process takes at least one month. Once the person is in Spain the organisation helps them to find a suitable place to live.

New comers are offered a 3 weeks language course accentuating the work specific language. Then they start working part time while they attend courses in Spanish culture and other topics. This year we have offered 48 different work related courses.

Most of the employees get a one year contract. 95 % wish to go on working after this year. If they want to bring their families, DIESA will also help them to do this.

It is a long and bureaucratic process to hire persons from other countries. It takes 4 months to employ 10 persons, but according to Diego Sanchez Pulido it is worth while. The organisation needs desperately people who can take responsibility, so when they see a competent person he or she is offered a better paid work as a leader. The management is all the time searching for persons who can function well as managers. Each year the employees are evaluated as to work development, which means how he treats fellow colleagues and guests, how he deals with conflicts and whether he really likes his job. Katya Ganchova Gerginova has proved to be such a person.

Interview with Katja Ganchova Gerginova

Katya is a young woman from Bulgaria. She was recruited in Bulgaria to work for DIESA. After 2 years she is area manager for 2 different cafes in the city of Manresa. Katya knows how to create a good atmosphere both among the employees and the café guests. When her boss told how happy he was with her work, the management decided to give her more responsibility, says Sanchez Pulido.

Katya, did you learn to speak Spanish here in Spain?

Yes, by attending language courses. I did not know that Spain also has Catalan as an official language. I do not master Catalan yet, I mix the languages all the time, but I am learning. The guests value the effort if you try to speak Catalan, but they often start to speak "castellano"

You are the manager of a group of employees of quite different origins, Romanians, Bulgarians and Spaniards. How do you manage this?

I treat the team as I treat friends. We discuss things and agree as what to do in the different situations. In the beginning it was difficult to give orders, but now I feel they respect me.

What kind of education and work experience did you have from Bulgaria?

I have attended 3 years at a college studying catering. And I have worked 4 years as a waitress in Bulgaria.

How did you get to know about the work possibilities here in Manresa?

I saw an advertisement in a magazine edited by the Ministry of Labour in Bulgaria. I applied and was asked to come for an interview.

Did you find the managerial culture in Spain different from the Bulgarian?

No. not at all.

What has surprised you the most about Spanish culture?

Spaniards have a lot of Fiestas the whole year. And they do not like to have to work these days. It is very practical that the immigrants are more flexible as to working hours.

The courses you may attend are they run after working hours?

The courses are run at a fixed time and those employees who are not on duty at that time get a compensation for attending the course.

Do you feel "less immigrant" since you became a manager?

I have never felt as an immigrant here in Spain.

Being a female immigrant and manager, have you had any problems with opposition from men?

I know some men find it difficult to have a woman as their boss. I have not met such problems, but I know the management would give me the necessary support.