

Aer Lingus 

ASCEND: MAINTAINING

EXCELLENCE WITH AER LINGUS

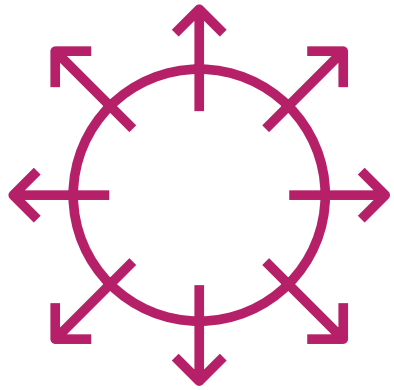
Discover the customer service programme at the highest
rated airline in Ireland

t-three



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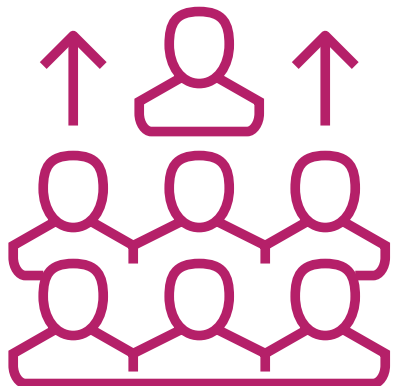
strong fleet of aircraft



More than

100

routes between airports in
the UK, Continental Europe
and North America



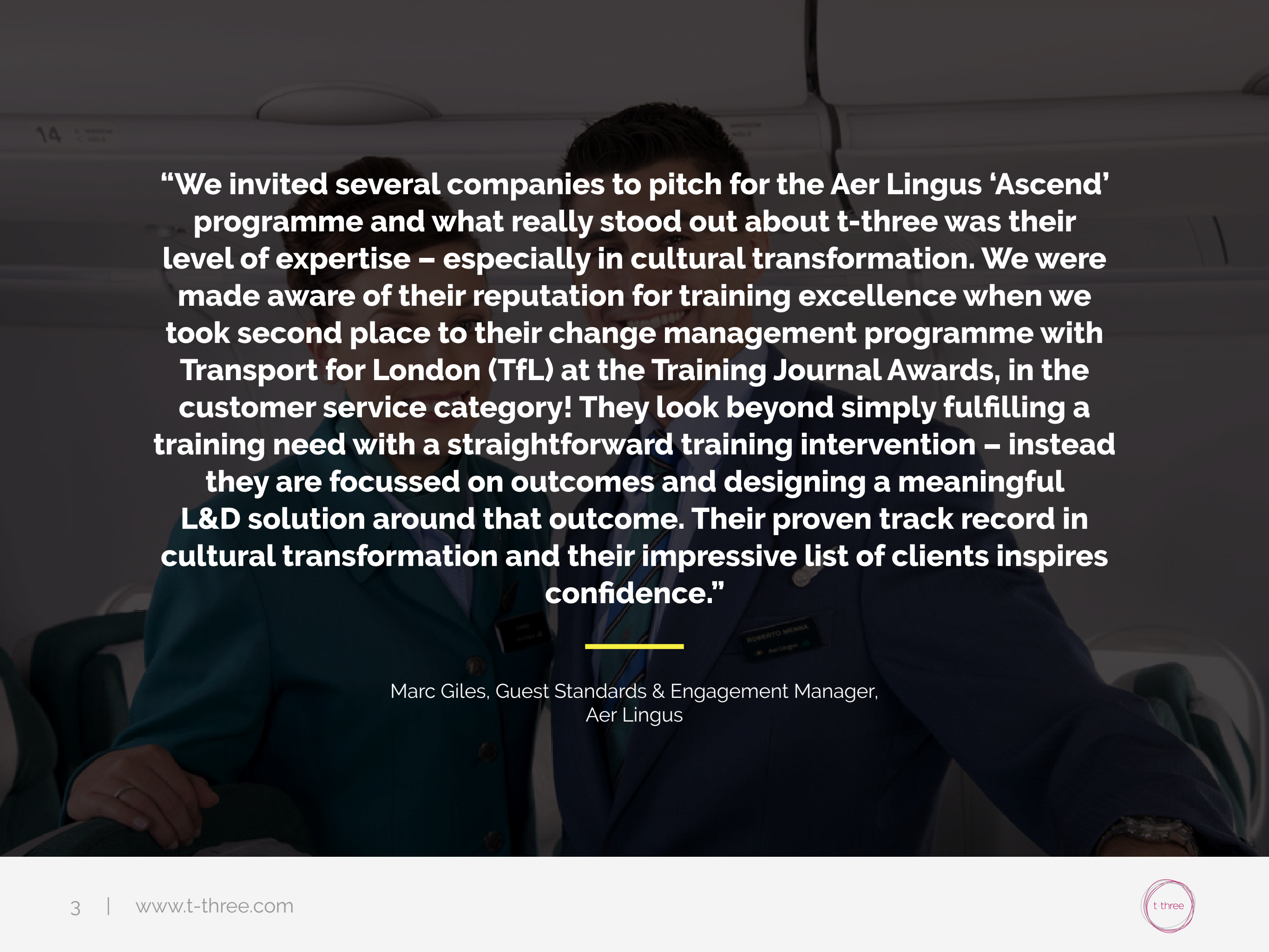
Carrying

12 million

customers every year

The national airline of Ireland, Aer Lingus, aims to be the leading value carrier across the North Atlantic. With a 4-star Skytrax rating from the industry's international ranking system, the company is already in a unique position with the highest rating for any airline in Ireland.

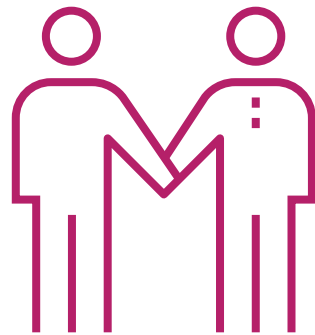
Keen to maintain and protect its 4-star rating within a competitive market challenged by the uncertainties of Brexit, Aer Lingus wanted to upskill their employees, increase consistency and continue to be as competitive as possible on price and service.



“We invited several companies to pitch for the Aer Lingus ‘Ascend’ programme and what really stood out about t-three was their level of expertise – especially in cultural transformation. We were made aware of their reputation for training excellence when we took second place to their change management programme with Transport for London (TfL) at the Training Journal Awards, in the customer service category! They look beyond simply fulfilling a training need with a straightforward training intervention – instead they are focussed on outcomes and designing a meaningful L&D solution around that outcome. Their proven track record in cultural transformation and their impressive list of clients inspires confidence.”

Marc Giles, Guest Standards & Engagement Manager,
Aer Lingus

The team at t-three embarked on a three-stage discovery phase to understand Aer Lingus' vision and how to help them achieve it.



**1:1 strategic interviews
with the management
team**



**Interactive focus
groups with live polling**



**Scrutinising existing
employee data and
Skytrax results**

“Engaging with a company’s internal stakeholders is often the single most important step to achieving their desired outcomes. It enables us to understand what success looks like for that company; helps us get to the heart of what needs to happen to bring about that success through sustained change and it involves everyone who will contribute to that success from the outset.”

Laura Whitworth, Director, t-three

“T-three were outstanding in their ability to tailor the content of the course – right down to individual delegates. Their in-class polling, where staff could complete a questionnaire on their smart phone, enabled them to understand individuals’ skills and knowledge and adjust course content accordingly. It’s that responsive approach – combined with the phenomenal knowledge and sheer energy of their trainers – that sets t-three apart. “

Marc Giles, Guest Standards & Engagement Manager, Aer Lingus

By meeting with senior managers, enabling staff members to give their opinions in a live, inclusive and 'safe' setting, and understanding the trends prevalent in previous research into the views of staff and customers, t-three had the tools to create a blended and bespoke programme of development that would build on the company's previous L&D programme: 'Good to Great'.

“Not only did this discovery phase give us that crucial insight into the company's strengths and areas for development; it also gave us a baseline measure for the all-important evaluation that would be ongoing throughout the programme.”

Laura Whitworth, Director, t-three



Strategic outcomes

The diagnostic phase revealed that the focus should be on the 1,330-strong population of long-haul cabin crew members with the key objectives being to:



Protect and maintain 4-star Skytrax rating



Equip crew with the principles of 4-star service delivery for business and economy class



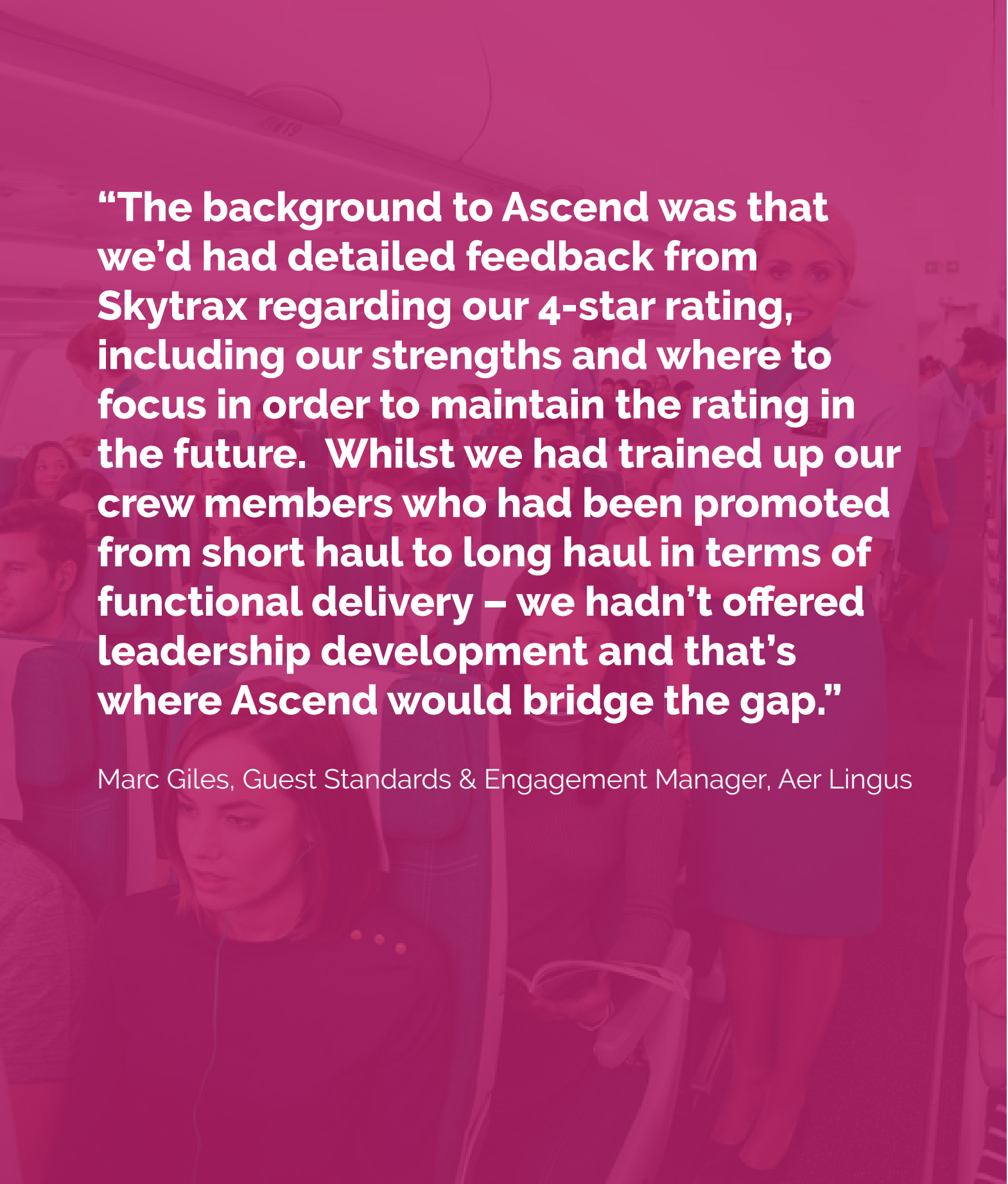
Develop a more consistent behavioural skill set and attitude



Cultivate more appropriate service dialogue with guests



Empower on-board leaders to manage their team with confidence



“The background to Ascend was that we’d had detailed feedback from Skytrax regarding our 4-star rating, including our strengths and where to focus in order to maintain the rating in the future. Whilst we had trained up our crew members who had been promoted from short haul to long haul in terms of functional delivery – we hadn’t offered leadership development and that’s where Ascend would bridge the gap.”

Marc Giles, Guest Standards & Engagement Manager, Aer Lingus

In aspiring to these goals, the programme would also challenge belief systems and underlying behaviours that could undermine consistent service delivery and jeopardise the company’s 4-star status.

To embed the change in mindset and sustain new, desired behaviours the Aer Lingus L&D programme ‘Ascend’ would also need to link the key concepts and skills learned into ongoing performance management tools.

Stakeholder engagement

“The people at Aer Lingus were brilliant to work with. They were very collaborative and really got involved at every stage of the process. They had a great sense of humour and were incredibly charming. Part of the challenge they faced in striving for excellence was to channel their charm and humour into consistently professional standards of customer service across the economy and business class cabins without losing the kind and warm personalities with which customers connected.”

“Our challenge as consultants was to support remote, often transient teams who rarely worked together; almost every day a Cabin Service Manager would be working with a brand new team to give guests the best possible in-flight experience. Giving all staff members strategies to help standardise their approach and attitude to guests meant that everyone knew what to expect as soon as they set foot on the plane. This improved customer experience – not just because staff were consistently helpful and polite – but also because standardising responses made for better service flows and helped managers build rapport and trust quickly, empowering them to lead effectively and efficiently with confidence.”

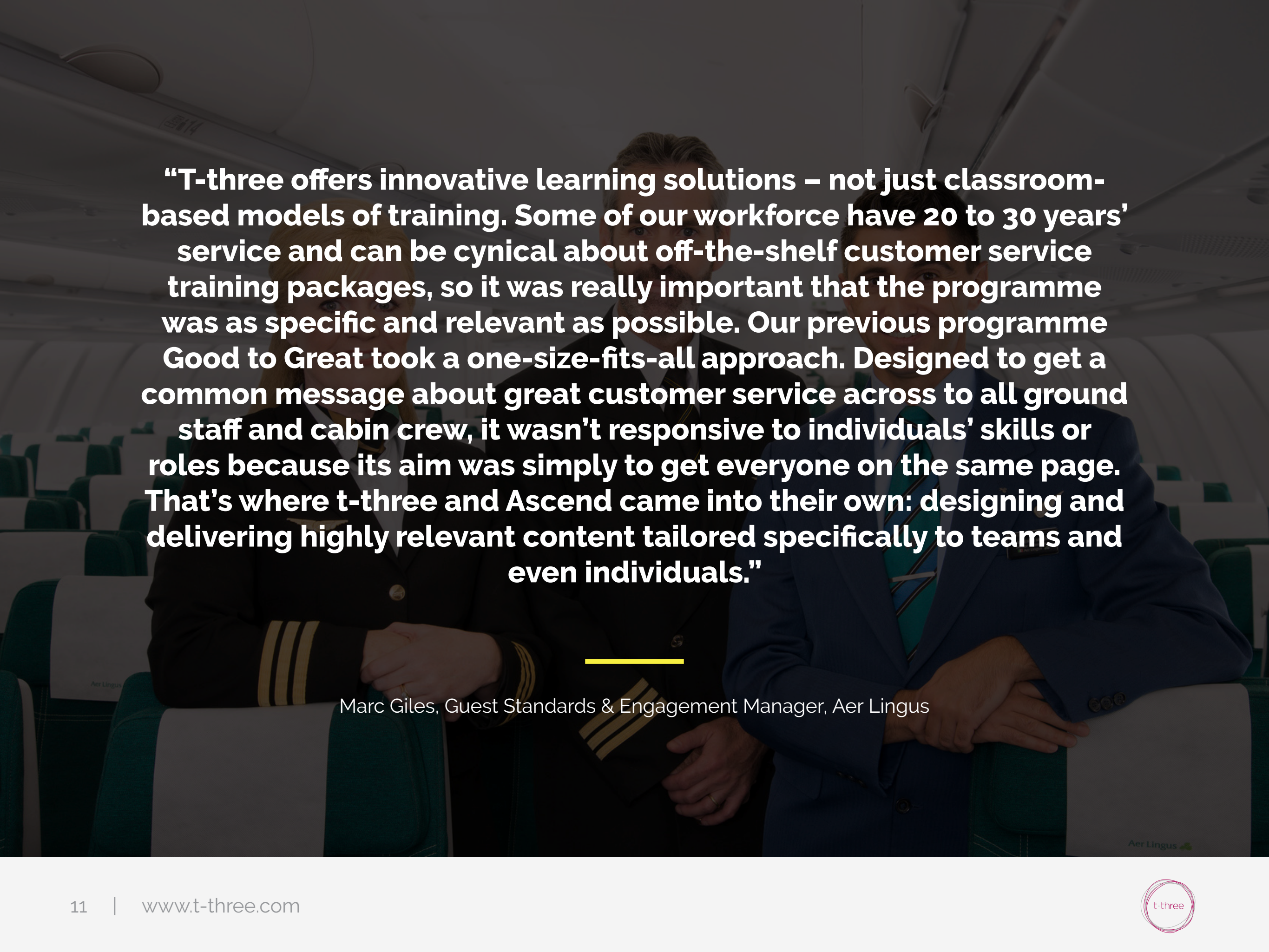
Laura Whitworth, Director, t-three

Design and delivery

Following the diagnostic phase, t-three continued to work closely with Aer Lingus to determine the design of the programme and its delivery.

The three-tiered 'Ascend' programme was designed to take an already excellent airline to outstanding levels of customer satisfaction. Their L&D programme for 2017 was segmented by role type with highly relevant, experiential interventions tailored specifically to each group of staff and the new, desired behaviours they should exhibit.



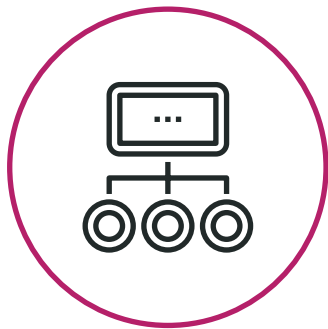


“T-three offers innovative learning solutions – not just classroom-based models of training. Some of our workforce have 20 to 30 years’ service and can be cynical about off-the-shelf customer service training packages, so it was really important that the programme was as specific and relevant as possible. Our previous programme Good to Great took a one-size-fits-all approach. Designed to get a common message about great customer service across to all ground staff and cabin crew, it wasn’t responsive to individuals’ skills or roles because its aim was simply to get everyone on the same page. That’s where t-three and Ascend came into their own: designing and delivering highly relevant content tailored specifically to teams and even individuals.”

Marc Giles, Guest Standards & Engagement Manager, Aer Lingus

General Cabin Crew

This sector of the Aer Lingus workforce also undertook training on new product and service initiatives and tools for crew members.



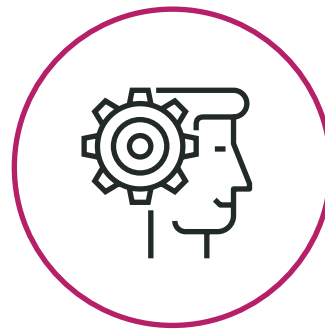
Getting the basics right

Service delivery training for business and economy cabins using an interactive quiz to assess knowledge in real time.



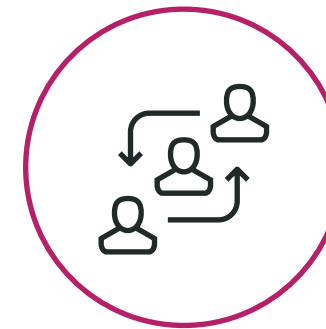
Professionalism

Workshops on how to handle complaints and manage conflict professionally and effectively.



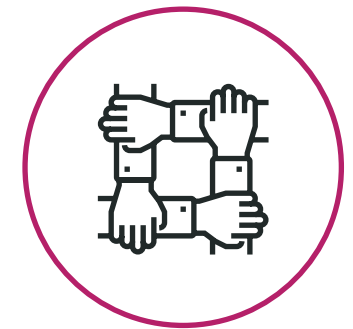
Specific service skills

Encouraging self-awareness through modules on 'presenting myself' and putting the customer first with 'effective listening' sessions.



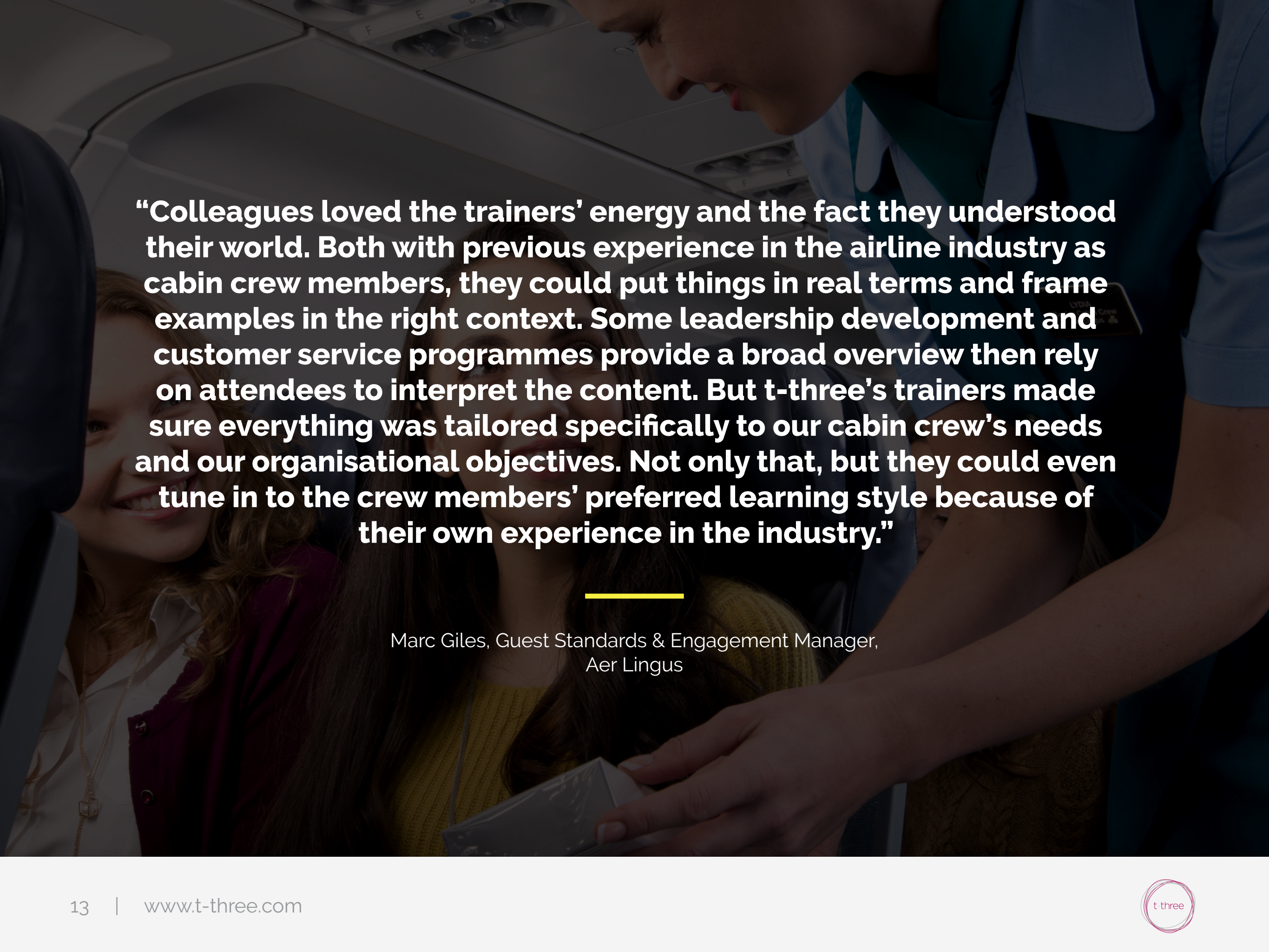
Service profit chain

A general overview of the premise, emphasising how important the employees are as part of the chain of service.



Tailored support

t-three delivered a series of short modules developed by Aer Lingus to help staff understand the specific needs certain customers might have. These included cultural sensitivity (for their increasingly diverse guest profile) and special needs awareness for guests with disabilities.

A photograph of Aer Lingus cabin crew members in training. A female crew member in a blue uniform is leaning over, showing something to two other women. One woman is smiling and looking at the object, while the other looks on. The background shows the interior of an aircraft cabin with overhead storage bins.

“Colleagues loved the trainers’ energy and the fact they understood their world. Both with previous experience in the airline industry as cabin crew members, they could put things in real terms and frame examples in the right context. Some leadership development and customer service programmes provide a broad overview then rely on attendees to interpret the content. But t-three’s trainers made sure everything was tailored specifically to our cabin crew’s needs and our organisational objectives. Not only that, but they could even tune in to the crew members’ preferred learning style because of their own experience in the industry.”

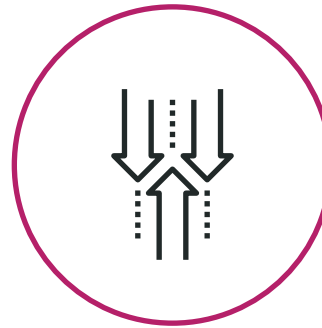
Marc Giles, Guest Standards & Engagement Manager,
Aer Lingus

Senior Cabin Crew and Cabin Service Managers



Service leadership

Focusing on self-awareness, emotional intelligence and empowering managers to see themselves as on-board leaders.



Quality and efficiency

Helping managers understand and drive on-board service flows and service standards.



Maintaining the Skytrax 4-star rating

Helping managers fully understand the 4-star requirements and audit feedback.



Coaching and performance management

To enable managers to get the best from their team.



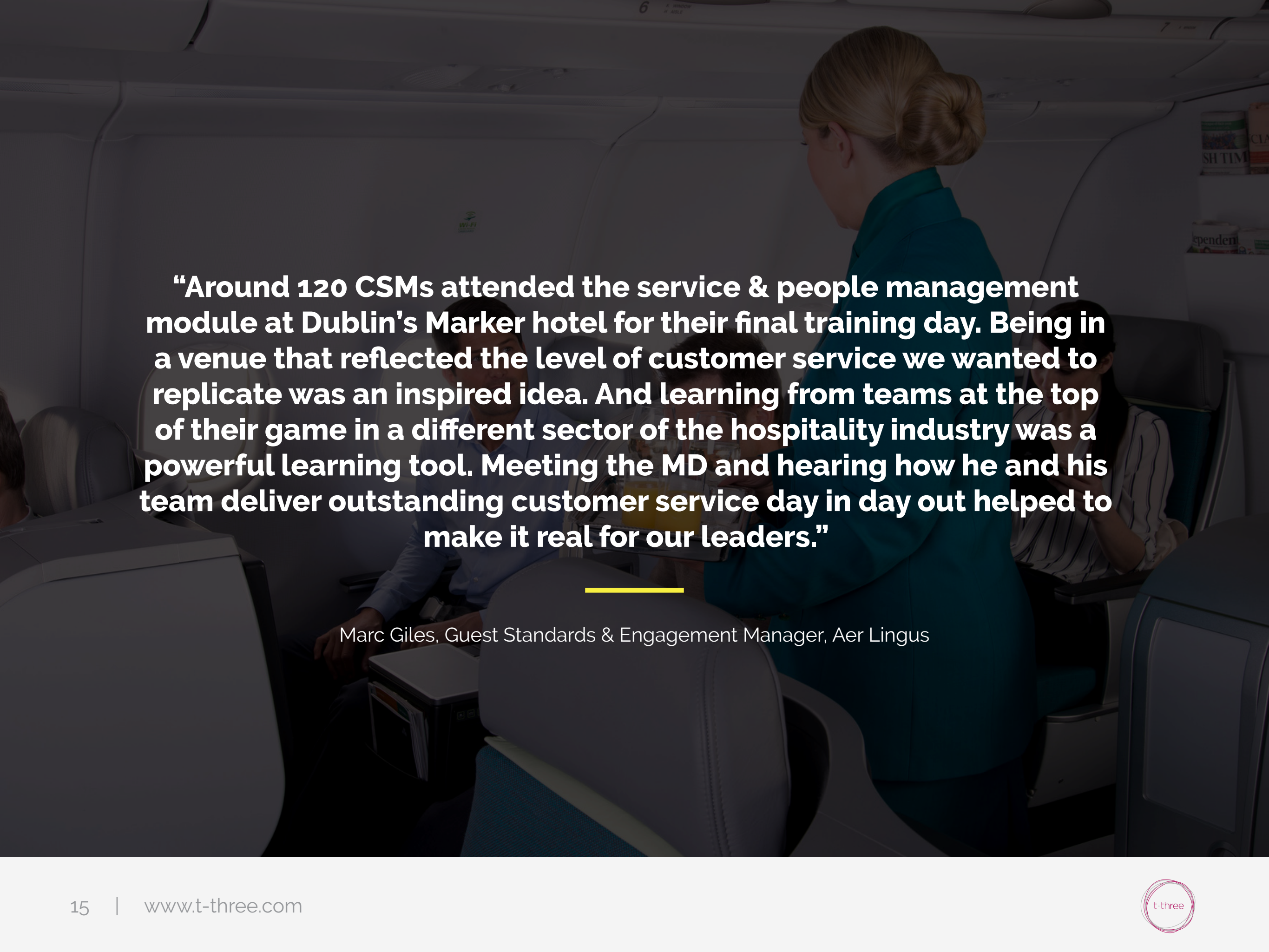
Expert insights video series

Building commercial and operational awareness through video footage featuring leaders from different parts of the business.



Managing difficult situations

Workshops and role play to practise effective conflict management and to learn how to manage different personality types effectively.

A background image showing an Aer Lingus cabin crew member in a teal uniform serving a passenger in an airplane cabin. The cabin has overhead storage bins and a 'Wi-Fi' sign. The text is overlaid on this image.

“Around 120 CSMs attended the service & people management module at Dublin’s Marker hotel for their final training day. Being in a venue that reflected the level of customer service we wanted to replicate was an inspired idea. And learning from teams at the top of their game in a different sector of the hospitality industry was a powerful learning tool. Meeting the MD and hearing how he and his team deliver outstanding customer service day in day out helped to make it real for our leaders.”

Marc Giles, Guest Standards & Engagement Manager, Aer Lingus

Cabin Service Managers



Service leadership

Building upon the content covered in the senior module, deep-diving into what it means to be a manager of service.



Coaching and performance management

Building upon the previous module, with a focus on growing talent through effective coaching and interactive exercises.team.



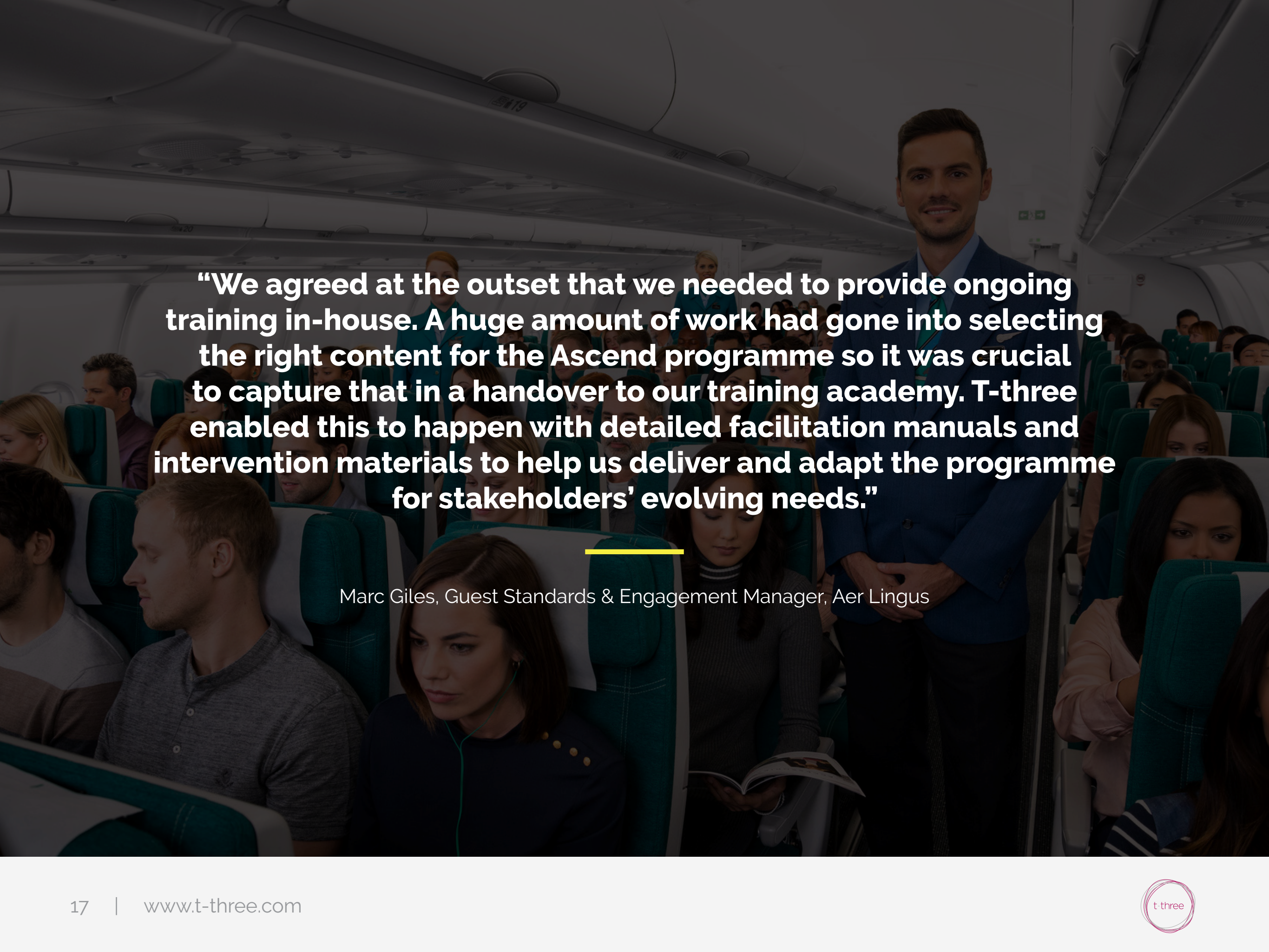
Service profit chain

The importance of leadership practices in fulfilling the chain, and how they continue to add commercial value in a competitive market.



Inter-industry awareness

Understanding what best practice looks like in hospitality across different industries with insights into how companies providing excellent customer service overcome challenges and inspire their teams.

A man in a blue suit stands in the aisle of an airplane cabin, smiling. Passengers are seated in teal and grey seats on either side of the aisle. The cabin interior is visible, including overhead storage bins and lighting.

“We agreed at the outset that we needed to provide ongoing training in-house. A huge amount of work had gone into selecting the right content for the Ascend programme so it was crucial to capture that in a handover to our training academy. T-three enabled this to happen with detailed facilitation manuals and intervention materials to help us deliver and adapt the programme for stakeholders’ evolving needs.”

Marc Giles, Guest Standards & Engagement Manager, Aer Lingus

Embedding the training

As well as enabling Aer Lingus' internal team to deliver ongoing learning, t-three worked with the airline to ensure the learning was embedded in the team's culture.

Only then would it result in sustained change and improved performance at an individual, team and organisational level. By focusing on behavioural change rather than simply training or learning; hosting follow-up events and arranging ongoing reviews and evaluation through the Know my Guest application and Mystery Shopping, t-three supported Aer Lingus to embed the cultural change they desired.



A photograph of an Aer Lingus aircraft cabin. In the foreground, a female crew member in a teal uniform stands smiling. Passengers are seated in green seats; some are looking at the camera, while others are looking down or away. A woman in the foreground is wearing headphones. The text is overlaid on yellow boxes.

In answer to the question

‘what will you do differently?’

– Aer Lingus crew members

said they would:

- Be more conscious of the way I deliver feedback and to whom
- Strive to unlock a person's potential to get the best from their performance
- Provide more motivational and constructive feedback
- Explore new ways to deal with difficult situations or people
- Ask crew's opinions on their performance and include them in their own performance enhancements
- Be more aware of my management style
- Use the coaching method and not just give my own opinion
- Provide more feedback and give more responsibility to senior crew members
- Brief and remind crew every day of how they feel being a guest
- Continue to read and learn about leadership principles



Feedback / results

T-three were able to use several metrics to evaluate the success of the Aer Lingus L&D programme.


Feedback from staff surveys and independent reviews of customer satisfaction showed significant improvements across the board:

- Highest ever staff rating for service training programmes at Aer Lingus with satisfaction scores averaging 93%
- 13-point improvement in November 2017 NPS* ratings represented a record high for Aer Lingus
- Industry-leading NPS** score, with a likely-to-recommend rating three times higher than other major airlines that Aer Lingus competes with
- Guests' satisfaction with crew members' performance on Aer Lingus long-haul flights improved to 88% in business class and 75% in economy class***
- Aer Lingus' operating profit increased by 36 million euro to 269 million euro in 2017.


*Net Promoter Score (i.e. likelihood that a customer would recommend the service to someone else)

**customer satisfaction in terms of likelihood of recommending the service to others was 3.5 times higher for Aer Lingus than the equivalent of another major carrier in business class and seven times higher in economy class cabins.

***Voice of Guest metrics




“Among my group of Cabin Service Managers we all agreed it was the best training we have received in Aer Lingus since we all joined.”



“I learnt that how I perceive myself is possibly not how others perceive me.”



“Loved the videos from different areas in the company putting faces on internal roles and the watercooler sketch.”

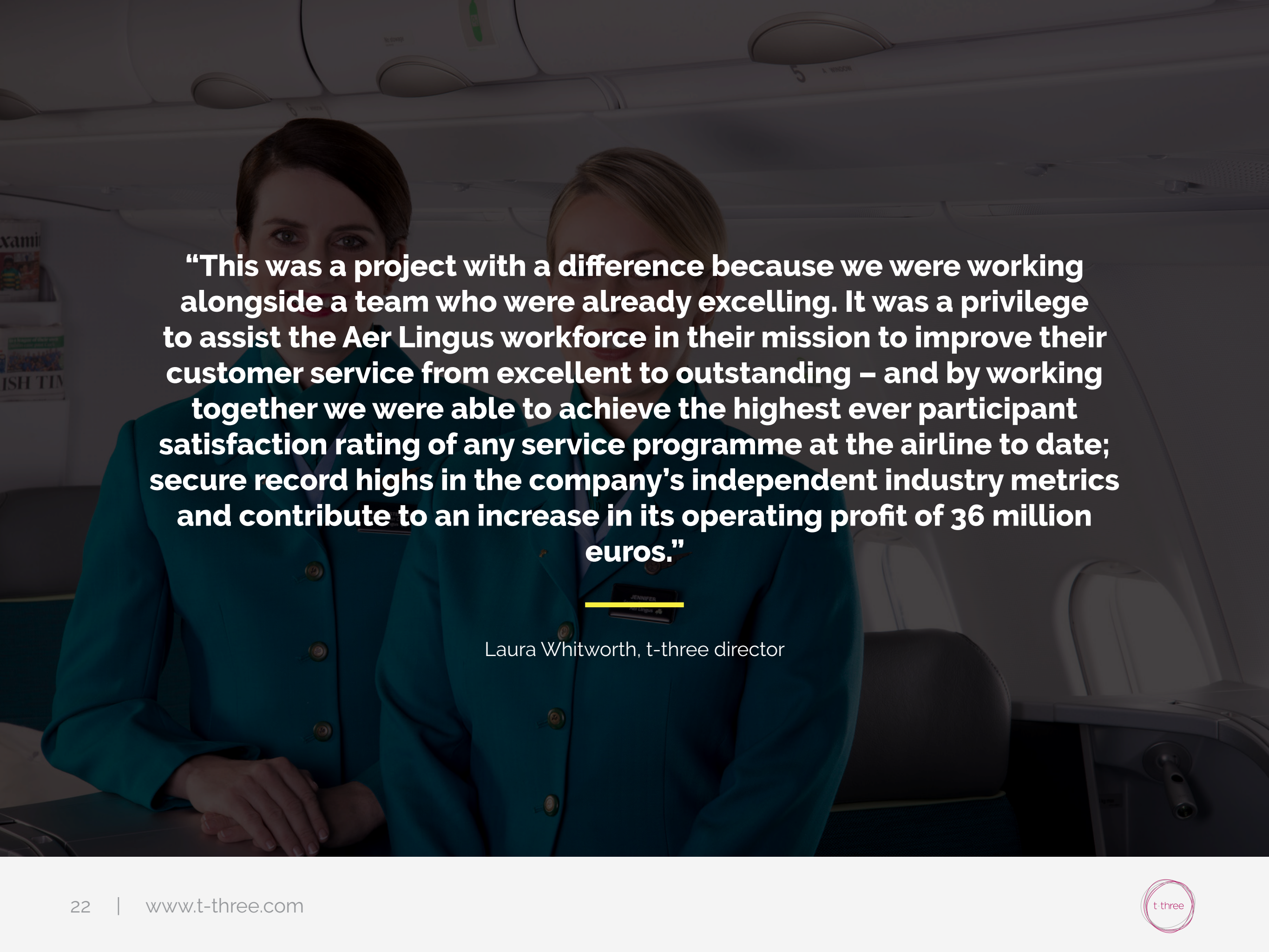


“A fresh look at how to deal with on-board issues and situations. I feel empowered to do my role better.”

Staff feedback

“One colleague, who has worked with Aer Lingus for more than 20 years, said it was without doubt the best in-service training programme they’d done with the company. And this was reflected in the staff satisfaction scores, which rose from around 77% satisfaction for previous L&D programmes to 93% for the Ascend programme.”

Marc Giles, Guest Standards & Engagement Manager, Aer Lingus



“This was a project with a difference because we were working alongside a team who were already excelling. It was a privilege to assist the Aer Lingus workforce in their mission to improve their customer service from excellent to outstanding – and by working together we were able to achieve the highest ever participant satisfaction rating of any service programme at the airline to date; secure record highs in the company’s independent industry metrics and contribute to an increase in its operating profit of 36 million euros.”

Laura Whitworth, t-three director



**Transform your business, inspire your
leaders and improve performance with
a bespoke learning and development
programme.**

Contact us

soak.t-three.com