



Case Study: Grand Hotel Malahide



Ownership type	Privately owned by Ryan family.
Business size	Medium.
Core activities	Hospitality, food and beverage.
Businesses	Grand Hotel Malahide, Marine Hotel Sutton.
Address	Grove Rd., Malahide.
Age	41 years old (starting with the Ryan family's involvement).
Generation	Second.
Employee no	180 (three family members actively involved).
Turnover range	€10-20 M.
Key Finding	Inter-generational learning.

Company Background

Matthew and Maureen Ryan entered the hospitality trade in 1960 when they opened a large tavern in Kildare. In 1974, the couple made the decision to buy the Grand Hotel Malahide—a 180 year old hotel with a succession of prominent owners. The hotel had only 36 rooms and 12 staff and required significant managerial and infrastructural investment. In 1989, the business expanded when the family purchased Marine Hotel Sutton, located ten kilometres from the original hotel. Over two decades, the Ryan family has overseen the redevelopment of the Grand Hotel Malahide, which has undergone more than seven refurbishment projects and extensions costing an estimated €35m; such projects include a conference centre, 150 additional bedrooms, a new reception area, Ryan's Bar, a Business Meeting Centre and the Coast restaurant overlooking Malahide Marina. At the opening of the newly refurbished hotel in 2007, former-Taoiseach Bertie Ahern stated: *"It is great to see a family-operated business such as this grow and prosper along with the surrounding area."* The Ryan family have revived the building, transforming it into a four-star rated hotel with 203 bedrooms and 180 employees.

Interview with Al Ryan

Director of Grand Hotel Malahide and Marine Hotel Sutton

Family Involvement

The second generation of Ryans were involved in the business throughout, starting in small roles, such as lounge boys, during the summer months. In the late 1980's, the three Ryan siblings joined the business in formal positions. All three are company directors: Matthew Ryan Junior is Managing Director, Al Ryan is Finance Director while Jean Ryan manages assets, building projects and building maintenance.

When considering family involvement, Al believes the following is important: *"The key thing is that the person is passionate so if they care about it and have some knowledge of it that's really 90% of it."* Al and his siblings have agreed that if anyone from the next generation enters the business it must be entirely voluntary commitment.



Company Director, Al Ryan



Family Affiliation

Having existed prior to the Ryan family's involvement, the Grand Hotel Malahide is very much a standalone entity. The clientele has changed over time with less focus on leisure and more on corporate, which counts for about 70% of their custom during the week. Al believes the family's direct relationship with the public was greater when it was smaller and more food and beverage oriented. However, Al believes that continuous family involvement strengthens their association with the business. *"If you're there forever then you're going to be identified with it."*



Grand Hotel Malahide in the 1970's (left) and today's establishment (right).

Grand Hotel Malahide —Inter-generational Learning in Family Business

Learning from the family and providing learning to the family are key features of multi-generational family firms. Learning can be generated from working in the business, being exposed to critical events in the firm, as well as adopting the lessons uncovered by previous generations. Equally important are the lessons received from non-family professionals and next generation members with the relevant training and experience.

In the Grand Hotel Malahide, the Ryans learnt about the business from a young age: *"You came in and did your job well, you got a few quid in your pocket and went home and you thought that was a good night and you learnt to deal with people"*. When purchasing the Marine Hotel Sutton, Al and his siblings were equipped with the necessary know-how to run a hotel, unlike their parents— who had to learn a lot first go. The founders' insights have been shared with the latest generation: *"My father always said: 'go and see who are the best and learn from them. You can improve it'.. we do it all the time"*.

However, not all learning emerged within the family, and in 1974 the Ryans brought in the original manager who assisted them and continued to work with the family hotel until retirement. Furthermore, the next generation can be a source of learning as evidenced when Al, Matt and Jean introduced innovative processes and efficiencies to the company. *"We were bringing in computerisation and modern systems that really weren't of any interest to him (first generation) but we were advancing the business with those projects"*. Today, the hotel employs an experienced management team to run its multi-faceted operations including sales, marketing and HR.