

Adjustments Continue, but Hoteliers Still Have Much To Be Thankful For

The Pandemic Has Given Hoteliers Courage To Try New Things



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At this time of year, we take stock of what has come before, give thanks for all those blessings we are fortunate enough to hold dear, and rededicate ourselves to the future.

Yes, it seems like it has been two unforgettable years rolled into one with the life-changing events brought about by the global COVID-19 pandemic. There is no way to underestimate its impact on industry metrics and specific locations and property types, guest behaviors, our people and the communities we serve.

While it looks like the virus may be with us for some time more in various guises, we are far enough along to see better days ahead. Serious challenges do remain. But we are restoring order to operations, financing and human resources and learning to innovate in many ways. Our job is to bridge the gaps that remain, a good deal of which relates to how we care for people.

Permission To Change?

As many in our industry have noted, some of these challenges we will discuss existed before the pandemic. Interestingly, pandemic necessities seem to have given the hospitality industry the permission or “courage” to be more realistic or flexible with respect to services offered, staffing systems and wages. Even with my current focus on select-service and extended-stay properties, which have experienced strength during the pandemic across many locations, we have had to respond and rethink long-held strategies and procedures.

One of the most noticeable areas to guests are food and beverage operations, especially breakfast, which can have a strong impact on satisfaction surveys. Even last year, many of us brought back a fuller breakfast, albeit with prepackaged items or through a staff-controlled buffet service. Here, the brands are helping operators by significantly narrowing the number of required items on breakfast offerings. A typical example might be reducing the menu from four or five dozen items to a more controllable and economical two-dozen. This is the kind of adjustment that makes real sense. It allows the operator to reduce costs without sacrificing the ability to provide a satisfying product to guests.

Similarly, the pandemic has forced us to rethink staffing, not just by looking at greater cross-training and shared responsibilities, but also addressing traditional staffing levels and shift timing. When a property only completely fills up on weekends and it is hard to recruit staff for these busier periods like a football weekend, it is time to consider staggered staffing and floating wage scales.

No one really thought we would be limiting room inventory because we were short of housekeeping resources or staff in general. However, contract labor, flex schedules, including employing two or three people to satisfy what used to be a single post, and flex wages are the new human resources realities. These changes have important implications for guest satisfaction, especially as the level of service must match the higher rates that many properties are commanding today, as well as organization-building.

Look to Your People

As noted, we are still scrambling a bit with staffing, scheduling and wage pressures. While contract staffing has had its own exigencies and, in some cases, excellent financial appeal, we may be sending mixed messages to our more permanent, directly hired staff. Thus, it is extremely important that we continue to focus on the holistic needs of team members and do everything possible to make hospitality more attractive as a long-term career.

In particular, in our select-service environment, this begins with encouraging team members to stretch their wings by learning as many aspects of operations as possible, which will lead to taking on greater responsibilities. At the same time, human resources staff is intent on learning what forms of compensation, benefits and scheduling are today most attractive to our core labor pool. This must be complemented by respectfully supporting the wider interests and needs of team members, whether it is pursuing higher education, community involvement or help with access to childcare or healthcare services. No single approach fits everyone. Every team member can make a difference.

During the pandemic, we have discovered our resiliency and gotten much better at defining and working on solutions to key issues going forward. Now, let's rekindle our passion for hospitality among our teams, while remaining humble and thankful for being able to share this great profession with others.

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