



Hospitality Can Help Bring Us Together

Hotel Leaders Must Continue To Emphasize Community Engagement

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Facing so many serious challenges as a nation, there is clearly an urgent need for some 330 million of us Americans to find common cause.

Like other industries, hospitality finds itself affected by powerful social and economic crosscurrents, including the COVID-19 pandemic and access to healthcare, which has resulted in unemployment, disruption in education at all levels and social disharmony that keeps boiling over in strange ways. As vaccines are being rolled out, we still face spikes of COVID-19 cases and the resulting strain on healthcare facilities.

This is the harsh reality we face, even as we look forward to recovery and some semblance of normalcy in the coming year. Without being judgmental of any individual's values or goals, it is incumbent on business leaders to, as much as possible, "Be a part of the solution." Moreover, our industry is well-suited to a local and national leadership role, helping out in practical ways wherever and whenever possible, while encouraging common courtesy and mutual respect in our dealings with each other. Who is better suited to this task of recovery and healing than an industry founded on people serving people. It's in our core DNA.

Healing Begins With Our People

As admirably as the hospitality industry has responded to business and personal disruptions brought about by the pandemic, there is no denying the profound effects it has had on each member of our groups. Nearly half of hospitality employees remain unemployed or underemployed. We wonder about the impact on

career progression and attracting new talent to our industry. This era of reduced personal interaction may strain relationships, letting uncertainties creep in.

Maintaining solidarity begins with trust, and for leadership that begins with frequent, straightforward communication, as well as sponsorship of realistic, practical, cost-effective programs. Supporting team members in this way can take a variety of forms, including vaccination or voting drives, helping staff find needed childcare, addressing mental health issues, or offering confidential professional consulting services. This is the time to forge ahead with other meaningful programs like addressing issues of diversity and inclusion in our society. Now, we do have everyone's attention. Simple things are also important. They include shoutouts of appreciation at daily staff meetings, sharing positive guest reviews or holding weekly lunches.

Caring for Communities

This leadership role that all our people can embrace extends to our friendly and generous reception of guests, visitors and strangers to our properties.

We have already stepped up to the plate as an industry as the pandemic unfolded, even as we were slammed with dramatic drops in occupancy and our staffing levels were reduced, whether hosting first responders, National Guard units, medical personnel or those who needed to isolate from a family member. More recently, the AHLA has volunteered hotels as community vaccination centers.

At the same time, many properties have made sure to continue its contributions to and involvement with valuable community organizations and programs. These efforts include on-site activities like blood drives, raising funds for groups like Make-A-Wish Foundation or the Humane Society, or preparing gift kits for seniors or children in need. Our people are discovering creative ways to stay involved in their communities, while still being careful about social distancing and other precautions.

As 18th century French scholar Louis de Jaucourt described it, hospitality is “the virtue of a great soul that cares for the whole universe through the ties of humanity.” A lofty mission, but successful businesses engage in meaningful activities. In ways only our industry can do best, let us help the healing begin.

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