

Hotels Ramp Up Recruitment, Retention Efforts Ahead of Busy Summer Travel Season

Flexibility and Mentoring Help Employees with Onboarding

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Even though the labor market is slowly loosening up, hotels are still in fierce competition for top talent. Hoteliers have learned that they need to be extra employee-friendly to bring in and keep staff members.

This is especially true as the busy summer travel season is approaching. Offering extra benefits, streamlining the interview process and settling new staffers more quickly into their jobs with mentors and others who can assist them are all ways that hoteliers can best attract these employees and ultimately keep them longer to reduce turnover.

"Hotel employers are working harder than ever to showcase how their management company will further the career of the existing and prospective employee. Also, employers are offering incentives like education reimbursement," said Tim Dick, executive vice president of hotels advisory with CBRE's Valuation, Advisory Services and Asset Management practice.

To improve the hiring experience for job seekers, for example, Hilton has increased its focus on making the hiring process go more quickly, said Laura Fuentes, Hilton's executive vice president and chief human resources officer.

"Speed is key, and hiring patterns should be immediate. We've also removed the college degree requirement for many of our positions, which makes the application process more inclusive," Fuentes said.

Hilton is "more actively developing and evolving programs to connect with our team members," she added.

This includes driving increased awareness of career potential at Hilton through employer-branding campaigns and streamlining the recruiting process.

There also is more focus on flexibility.

"One of the ways we're helping to drive that retention is by recognizing that flexibility is not one-size-fits-all. Flexibility, by its very definition, is about giving our team members the opportunity to choose how they work and what type of work they do," she said.

For instance, Hilton created a "SuperFlex" workforce model for call-center team members, allowing them to choose their schedule and number of work hours, Fuentes said. Hilton also is offering reduced schedules and sabbaticals to all U.S. full-time team members, enabling them to arrange a condensed

workweek or take temporary leave. In addition, there is unpaid leave when they need it, while maintaining full benefits and job security.

Aimbridge Hospitality has expanded its market-based recruiters, which has reduced the time to fill hotel hourly roles by 70%, said Patrick Volz, the company's chief operating officer of global operations. In addition, the Aimbridge Task Force, comprised of 95 leaders across all disciplines, is dedicated to filling vacant manager and director roles, ensuring continuity and staff support when there is a vacancy at a hotel leadership or department head level.

"General managers need to think creatively to address today's labor challenge, going beyond referral incentives and sign-on bonuses," Volz said.

The company has heard through its own research and surveys that second to wages, associates are looking for flexibility. With that in mind, Aimbridge launched a shift-sharing "gig" workforce app that allows employees to search and sign up for additional shifts at similar hotels, brands and roles in the same market.

"Hotel managers and leaders must address what is important to the workforce today, having more control over the way they live and work. We have addressed this by providing access to earned wages through Payactive daily pay and offering flexible scheduling to meet the needs of our hotels, but at the times associates are available," Volz added.

Deanne Frame, director of human resources at the McNeill Hotel Co., said: "We want a full bench on our team, so we are open to new talent. However, we are also working diligently to find a balance between new associates and our tenured associates."

For example, McNeill may offer sign-on bonuses, while also awarding bonuses to tenured associates who went above and beyond in their jobs, stretched themselves and performed admirably during the pandemic, she said.

The company also has special benefits including a paid volunteer time program that allows employees to pursue community activities of their choice during a workday. In addition, McNeill has looked closely at the onboarding process over the past several years with the goal of making it as user-friendly as possible, along with making employment decisions as quickly as possible, Frame said.

"This does not preclude a rigorous process that includes appropriate background checks," Frame said. "However, hourly candidates can access an application form through a quick link on their smartphone, and we are working aggressively to complete most employment decisions within 48 to 72 hours."

New hourly hires are introduced to a "buddy system," Frame said. This helps them acclimate to their new assignment, company standards and brand standards, which is especially important if they are new to hospitality.

At the Valencia Hotel Group, questions are asked during the interview process to make sure every new hire aligns with the company's core values to ensure the right cultural fit, said Wendy Norris, vice president of marketing and revenue optimization.

"We have deepened our investment in team members by focusing on consistent training, empowerment and professional development," she said. "This builds confidence in our associates, increases our guest

satisfaction and loyalty, and decreases turnover. We believe that if our core values are in alignment with our new hires, that turnover will decrease."

Nick Falcone, chief executive officer of Rentyl Resorts, said his company has put a big focus on its mentorship program.

As part of onboarding and orientation, new hires are introduced to a company mentor, who is a leader within the organization. The mentor is given the new employee's goals and tasked with helping put that individual on a path within the company to achieve those goals.

"In regard to culture and benefits, we are constantly adding more employee perks, recognition programs, team-building activities, professional development and more," Falcone said.