
Make Hospitality an Attractive Career

Reward Employees and Reexamine Hiring Practices

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As we progress from the pandemic, it is no secret that the hospitality industry faces serious challenges in finding and retaining needed staff, especially entry-level, frontline people who directly care for our guests. There is a sense of urgency as we compete fiercely with other service industries, including ones with excellent wage scales compared to just a year ago.

There are many moving pieces to this employment puzzle. Sure, compensation is always important. However, we must create a work environment that meshes our requirements with the practical needs and inner priorities of today's applicants.

More Voices at the Table

It starts with keeping team members informed about the challenges and successes happening across the organization. Effective modes include daily motivational messages; staff newsletters that share important brand updates, new hires and promotions; community activities and inspiring guest reviews; and daily "huddles," where team members are encouraged to participate and take the lead on a rotating basis. Today's best proprietary message systems also allow property managers to quickly send out notes to a group or an individual. This can be a great way to say "well done" to a team member on the spot.

In today's social environment, it is also appropriate to encourage responsible discussion. In response to social issues ignited in part by the pandemic, many hospitality organizations revitalized or began meaningful programs to enhance diversity and inclusion. A diversity council, with an independent leadership, bylaws, agenda and budget, can be an excellent forum to discuss serious contemporary issues and bridge across social or cultural divides. It may be valuable in these efforts to retain a third-party adviser to help guide this group, but do include the activities of such groups in the organization's newsletter or the agenda for annual leadership conferences.

In a similar vein, we can sponsor town halls at a property or across properties as a way to reinforce that we are all in this together. The goals of these efforts: be willing to listen to and respect other people's opinions; learn how we can understand each other better and work together better. There will be some tough conversations that ensue. We must understand and accept that.

Get on Board and Stay on Board

Many organizations are also exploring new means of recruiting and selecting new staff. Some of the approaches in use include: hiring line-level employees through a recruiting firm; personality tests to help screen for aptitude for guest service; mining relationships with local schools, community colleges and job counselors; or signing and retention bonuses.

This is also the time to reexamine traditions of hospitality like appearance standards and scheduling. Rigid scheduling may be easier and less expensive to manage. However, in today's employment world, it can exclude many valuable workers from single or dual income parents to college students or seniors who can only work limited hours. Technology can help with the more complex scheduling, evaluation and payroll and human resources functions. But the bigger issue may be mindset — on our part.

The pandemic also introduced or reinforced flexibility in job functions, as we scurried to do more with less people. Certainly, greater cross-training and functioning in multiple roles — right from the time of hire — is likely to become a permanent fixture of hospitality operations. In addition to stimulating skills sets and encouraging teamwork, it also exposes newcomers to the broader possibilities of a hospitality career. Send an appealing message that each day presents fresh and appealing challenges.

Expanding on this last issue, this is the time for hospitality organizations to expand their continuing education and management in training programs to identify individuals ready for positions of greater responsibility. Importantly, management in training programs only work well when supervisors have the confidence to assign expanded responsibilities, along with the authority to complete them.

Deep down, no staff member wants to be asked to leave their brain at the door when they report to work or be treated as a commodity. It takes strong leadership on our part to

appreciate today's labor dynamics and, working with our brand partners where applicable, adjust accordingly. Not a leap of faith as much as a leap of common sense and trust in our intrinsic human connections. The result will be stronger, more effective hospitality groups.

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