

There's No Such Thing As A Hotel 'Job' Anymore



As the gig economy continues to take hold in various industries, it is also changing how we think about our chosen line of work. The 9-to-5 office is eroding while working from home and working when you want behaviors are gaining widespread acceptance. The impacts for hotels are manifold.

At its core, this freelancer economy promotes a transient approach to wage earning. That is, you get the exactly what you put into it and not a penny more. The more you work, the more money you make, with a few demand-based algorithms to keep rates attuned to market pressures. Further, there's little emotional investment in the parent company – largely due to the disconnectedness of employee-employer relationship – nor are there any incentives to rise within the ranks of the corporate hierarchy.

While it's easy to see how this new system plays out for network-based enterprises like Uber, Lyft, TaskRabbit or even Airbnb, my fear is that this 'gig' or 'e-lancing' outlook on employment will have a ripple effect through the bottom rungs of the hotel ladder.

It used to be that hospitality was an industry which not only extolled but also excelled at promoting from within. If you started as a bellhop, or in my case as a car jockey, in your teenage years and if you worked hard, you could rise to be the general manager one day. In this sense, a hotel or other hospitality organization acted like a family, nurturing and encouraging its youthful recruits then giving gradually giving them more important responsibilities and showing them how all parts of the operation worked.

Now, however, this promise of ascension is being attacked on two fronts, both by the increasing education requisites for introductory management roles and by the aforesaid gig mentality. While the former could be the subject of a much lengthier piece on the applicability of university or college degrees, the latter has the power to destroy any sense of passion for hospitality in those employees not already in supervisory roles. And it's that passion that will fuel everything from properly cleaning rooms and excellent guest service delivery to many future innovations.

If a bright, young and eager employee enters a junior hospitality role with a freelancer attitude, then it means they will treat this position like a 'job' and not the start of a 'career'. The distinction between these two words is paramount; the former is akin to a mercenary whereas the latter is a patriotic soldier for the cause. Simply put, you are either passionate about your chosen line of work and see it as a career opportunity, or you shouldn't be there. This is doubly true for hospitality, where passion and guest service excellence are inextricably linked.

In an ideal world, every single employee or associate would view his or her role within your organization as part of a career. But quite a few people don't know what they want, and that's not something you can control. The best you can do is create a healthy environment where these individuals will come to see a career with you as a worthwhile pursuit. Ultimately, the passion must come from within.

Yes, you can screen for attitude during an interview, but in the much the same way as dating gives way to co-habitation, marriage and kids, passion and determination to pursue a chosen career path must continue to blossom over time. If your corporate culture is not family-oriented and does not support the long-term growth of associates into managers, directors and executives, then any individual who passes your screening process with flying colors will become progressively demoralized, eventually reverting to a gig-like mentality whenever they grace your halls.

In other words, the interview is just the beginning of the relationship. While it mandates an associate to work hard and to growth within a role, it also entails some effort on your part to earmark those individuals showing promise and mentor them accordingly. And as freelance work becomes ever more prevalent, ensuring that employees understand the true value of working with you over the long-term will become all the more vital.

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