HVS

Associate Retention & Motivation In Hotels: Let's Leave Pandemic Crisis Mode and Focus on Employee Satisfaction Again

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The pandemic's negative effect on the hospitality industry, especially its ability to hire new associates, will be long felt even as we see signs of recovery. Many have left the industry for other opportunities considered more stable. The more leadership can recognize, motivate, and reward team members, the stronger the chances are of rebuilding and retaining staff for the long term. There are so many hidden and not-so hidden costs of high turnover that exploring all options to retain your valuable associates is more important than ever.

New associates are excited to come to work, be productive, and help provide for their family, but once they've been working the position over time and following a routine, what keeps them interested and what motivates them to not only do well, but do well for you? The more successful your team is, the greater the hotel will deliver consistent quality, the more successful you will be, and you'll have a stronger ability to retain good people. Society has conditioned people to expect a reward for just about everything these days, especially with the younger generation, so motivation and encouragement in the workplace is essential for every organization.

There are many common sense approaches to ***motivate and retain*** associates. There is often little distinction between the two as they can be tied closely together, and both enhance results.

> *"Motivation is the art of getting people to do what you want them to do because they want to do it." - Dwight D. Eisenhower*

How are you accomplishing this? Various examples are:

- ***Just say "Thanks"***! When you observe an associate doing or saying the right thing, do you stop and acknowledge them for their actions? Be sure to tell them why you're thanking them. Instant recognition has tremendous impact and keeps employees excited about what they do because people want to know that they make a difference.
- ***Money*** is not always the exclusive consideration for associates. However, financial rewards, when handled appropriately and strategically, can be an effective method of recognition for a job well done. In fact, employee benefits and other forms of non-wage compensation can be more important to retaining an associate than the base pay itself.

Summary

The Pandemic's negative effect on the hospitality industry, especially its ability to hire new associates, will be long felt even as we see signs of recovery. Many have left the industry for other opportunities considered more stable. The more leadership can recognize, motivate, and reward team members, the stronger the chances are of rebuilding and retaining staff for the long term.

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- ***Status*** and position enhancements, such as creating a leadership role or asking staff to lead a project are an inexpensive and effective method to reward good performance. Offering someone a leadership position or the opportunity to cross train not only makes for a stronger, more versatile team member, but recognizes an individual for their effort. If you've asked a line employee to train a new employee, why not add "*Trainer*" to their name tag? You are telling them that you value their input and want to develop them. Even if they don't have enormous ambitions, this can be motivational.
- ***Empowerment*** has become trite, but it can have tremendous benefits for an organization. Use it carefully and promote it with the entire team. Empowerment brings pride in position and self-worth. Associates empowered to make decisions, even with guidance and limitations, develop loyalty to the organization and greater confidence in what they do.
- ***Respect*** is both earned and a baseline level of treatment. Regardless of how bad a day, week, or month you have, offer the same respect to your team you desire. Everyone seeks acceptance in their personal lives and their work lives, and respect will communicate that to your staff. In turn, they will treat your guests with greater care and respect as well.
- Does your ***culture*** promote recognition or does the workplace have more of a self-centered, uncaring, unemotional, and "*let's just get the job done*" mentality? If your hotel's culture is not one with a high-energy and positive personality, work to change it now! Everyone wants to feel a part of something great, not something stifled.
- ***Incentives*** such as sign-on bonus, retention programs, and pay-for-performance programs that are robust enough to be attractive and tied to your goals, so your organization has an advantage over the competition; staff are appreciative of the opportunities.
- ***Enhanced vacation*** benefits can be attractive. Consider offering additional vacation time such as three or even four weeks' vacation the first year and start accruing day one. This can make the hotel more competitive for staff. What's the cost of providing this versus the costs of high turnover, such as lost productivity, training, inconsistency, and low guest satisfaction scores?
- ***Create a personal connection*** with your associates by finding common interests. Working together daily can create stronger bonds and ownership of the hotel's mission. Discover what makes them tick personally. The better you know your team and the more bonded they are to each other, the higher the probability they'll stay longer as a result of a personal connection and desire not to disappoint you and co-workers.
- Additional examples to motivate and retain associates can be creatively crafted:
    - Activities within and outside the job description.
    - Opportunities for additional skills or advancement.
    - Feedback, both positive and negative.
    - Committees to enhance camaraderie across departments.
    - Invite family members to functions more than once per year.
    - Potluck functions within departments, encouraging home country or home-town themes.
    - Community or charitable involvement as a team.
    - Special occasion celebrations.
    - Property financial and operational updates.
    - Personal updates of staff even using old-fashioned bulletin boards or newsletters – new babies, childrens' accomplishments, new homes, etc.
    - Create fun but inexpensive rewards such as bus passes, certificates and trophies for minor or silly achievements (these actually are the most fun and sought after), movie passes, manicures, etc.

I have always been a believer in having some fun with work. The day you wake up and dread going to work is the day you should either explore how this can change or you should begin your search for another position. It's leadership's responsibility to prevent that continuously and creatively.

- ***Contests*** are an excellent tool. Create competitive teams within the same department for a common goal with an appropriate reward. For example:

  I once split the housekeeping department into multiple teams. Each team could earn 25 points if everyone showed up to work as scheduled, 25 points if properly groomed and everyone in uniform, including name tag, 25 points for the highest room inspection scores daily and if all three were achieved, a bonus of 25 points. All of these created peer pressure. The inspections were completed by the opposing team. The reward was cash and a luncheon for the winning team in the hotel restaurant served by all management all departments and the General Manager (GM). We achieved the AAA Four Diamonds rating we were aiming for. There are many fun and motivational contests that can be tailored to your goals, so be creative.

- ***Transparency and information*** are effective tools. Share your profit & loss statements with every department and review it in a staff meeting every month. Most employees may not realize how much the utilities cost, or payroll, or operating supplies. (Redact payroll information that shows a single person's pay). More understanding of the business means they can look for opportunities to impact the bottom line. Then, reward them for cost-savings or revenue-producing ideas.
- ***Trust in your team***. If you don't have trust, you have nothing. If you've done your job training and providing the proper tools and resources, trust them to perform admirably. Positively reinforce that trust by recognizing the decisions they make.
- ***Feedback*** is essential, both positive and negative. We can all recall negative or constructive feedback that stung but worked. One of the greatest forms of motivation is positive feedback, especially if it follows an earlier, more critical conversation. Feedback also communicates caring and confirms that what the team does and how they do it is important to the future of the hotel.
- ***Enable*** your team to want to do more. Training, empowerment, tools, and resources increases the staff's confidence and improves the likelihood of their success and yours.
- ***All-employee*** monthly meetings can be impactful and create connection but that requires high attendance, so you need to drive participation creatively. I used to play a game show host, with a cheesy plaid sports jacket from a thrift store. The meeting was fun and rewarding with contests, while delivering important messaging to the staff. The prizes were small but it increased attendance and made a difference in the quality of work, camaraderie, guest satisfaction, and employee opinion surveys.
- ***Lotto*** tickets always work, are inexpensive, and fun for the team. Of course, if someone wins really big, you'll lose them but, the likelihood is so small and it's incredibly motivational for the remaining staff!
- ***Surprise snacks***. As a GM, I used to deliver them summer ice cream treats personally where they're working throughout the hotel. Or make Tuesday Treats a weekly event and vary the selection such as ice cream, candy, salty snacks, pizza slices, fruit, etc.
- ***Back of the House*** – eliminate the drab, beige, and shabby. Make back-of-the house pleasant, colorful, and inviting. Associates often spend more time at work than at home, so make it enjoyable. Allow the team to be a part of the planning and new look. And keep it as well-maintained as the front of the house – especially the bathrooms. When there's a difference in maintenance between front-of-the-house and back-of-the-house space, this can be demotivating and staff can become resentful.
- ***Get your hands dirty!*** I once took over a property and within my first two weeks I went to the laundry and started folding linen. The entire laundry staff, most of whom had been working there for 20+ years,

stopped, and stared, asked what I was doing and tried to push me aside, because they had been taught it was beneath the GM to do that. I was later told it was the first time in over nine years **any** general manager had come to the laundry (unless there was an emergency) or helped or got to know them. It became a weekly highlight for me, and the laundry staff fed me quite well with homemade food.

- ***Name tags*** can make interaction more personal. But associates routinely forget them. If you want to encourage guest interaction, while motivating the associate to do the right thing, make the staff member wear a name tag that says, "*I Forgot My Name Today*". It's fun for co-workers to watch a staff member explain to a guest why they're wearing that tag. It motivates the associate to be more interactive and the guest has fun with it.

You've undoubtedly spent time thinking about motivating, recognizing, and retaining team members. Other ideas and inspiration can be found daily by employing MBWA (Management by Walking Around). ***Respect, reward, include, and participate*** and you'll have a team that wants to excel for you. You'll be rewarded with higher staff retention and excellence, resulting in higher profits. Please contact me at **** for a list of interesting and creative retention, motivation, and reward ideas.

> ***Remember, "It's not important to be better than someone else, but to be better than you were yesterday." Jigoro Kano.***

About Neil J. Flavin

With involvement in all ongoing projects, Neil is responsible for the overall operation of the Advisory, Asset and Hotel Management division of HVS. With 40 years of diverse hospitality experience with various brands and franchisors, including managing brand and owner relationships in the New York area for upscale and first-class hotels with IHG, his knowledge of the industry has assisted owners in maximizing value and return.

Prior to joining HVS in 2015, his other experience includes President of a management company, successful restaurant owner, Regional VP of Operations for Hyatt, transforming assets from AmeriSuites to Hyatt Place, organizing and implementing multi-unit management practices, Regional Director of Operations at IHG for Crowne Plaza Hotels & Resorts and numerous assignments as a General Manager with various corporate or management positions within Marriott, Ritz Carlton and other management companies.

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