



Human Resources, Recruitment & Training

How the Hospitality Industry is Rethinking Development for its Next Generation of Leaders

Who's Got the Next Round?

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So where will we find the next generation of leaders in the hospitality industry? Like their counterparts in other business sectors, this question remains top-of-mind for those responsible for finding, managing, and developing the talent needed to ensure the vitality of their organizations. While, arguably, not as glamorous as a new guest amenity or as important as a cost-saving innovation, there is nothing more critical than talent to succeed in an increasingly competitive and challenging global business environment. Leveraging the best strategies and tactics related to talent management, succession planning, workforce planning, training and leadership development are, quite possibly, a company's most critical work.

From using psychometric tests and business simulations to assess candidate fit to touting environmental and sustainability efforts across social media platforms to attract millennials, hotels are investing heavily in efforts to capture- and keep- top talent. In an era where poor reviews on Trip Advisor or unflattering vacation posts on Facebook can swiftly and directly impact the bottom line, the stakes for creating and maintaining a robust cadre of leaders - from the front desk to the property's senior leadership team- have never been higher.

In the end, it is the quality of talent which has been assembled, that the hotel, property, or management company is placing its bet on to create and maintain the brand and, ultimately, drive business results. In short, customer loyalty is pursued and built through the consistent actions of engaged individuals who have been selected, trained, developed and rewarded for directly or indirectly creating memorable guest experiences, consistent with the brand. In addition to solid selection, performance management, and reward systems, a robust learning and leadership development strategy may be the most critical piece of the talent puzzle. Moving past simple platitudes, such as 'people are our most valuable assets', and into ascribing strategic priority status to, and actual investment in, impactful development activities is what is required.

While the majority of businesses appreciate that development of employees is a prerequisite to the successful execution of the company's strategy and overall long-term organizational health, not all are fully aware of the innovations which can transform a solid training and development strategy into a powerful business tool. Leading-edge organizations are recognizing the shifts in today's business and human capital landscapes, and are taking traditional methods- like leadership development programming or career pathing frameworks- and modifying them to fit the realities of today's talent pool.

The massive influx of millennials into the workforce has significantly changed the way businesses approach talent. This group of new leaders is looking for that next career challenge almost immediately, expecting a constant stream of learning and development opportunities and, are largely unwilling to play by the same

organizational rules as their Baby Boomer counterparts. The notion of having to wait fifteen years before having an opportunity to assume a General Manager (GM) role is now anathema. As Robert Mellwig, Senior Vice President, Really Cool People, at Two Roads Hospitality reported to me, the 'design and employment of alternative career path frameworks is just one reaction to the realities of the demographics'. One result at Two Roads Hospitality has been the marked increase of GM candidates emerging through more untraditional routes within the organization (personal communication, Robert Mellwig, SVP, Really Cool People, Two Roads Hospitality, December 19, 2016).

The Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts transformed their traditional GM Boot Camp experience into a GM Leadership Academy, aimed at accelerating the development of its next generation of leaders. The Academy design allows for some individuals to progress through the journey to 'GM-readiness' at a swifter pace than others, providing an engaging, tailored experience. Offered once a year to a targeted group of 15-20 high potentials, the Academy incorporates a wide variety of learning modalities, including pre-work, skill-based online resources, mentors, external executive coaches, formal face-to-face workshop sessions, assessment/feedback instruments, a series of action learning projects, and outside faculty. Outside resources are required to be well-versed in the 'Four Seasons' way before engaging with the program (personal communication, Ed Evans, CHRO, The Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, December 21, 2016).

In a similar vein, at The Breakers Palm Beach, an innovative leadership mentoring program, called Millennials in Motion, has been developed to connect young men and women with varying skill levels and experience with more seasoned colleagues in growth-level management positions. The program provides guidance, life coaching interactions, and training to prepare individuals for future leadership roles within The Breakers. The six-month program rests on a mentor-mentee dyad matching of millennials, based on interests, with the goal of cross-pollinating between areas of the hotel (e.g., Guest Services, Finance). The development experience includes dyad work, large group events, self-directed learning, senior business leader and external thought leader experts, a validated behavioral assessment inventory, executive sponsorship, and involvement of the owner. The program focuses on a broad constellation of leadership competencies, as well as areas in finance, health, community service, and sustainability. The hotel points to the increased rate of promotions for program participants as evidence of success. Equally important, mentees also move on to serve as mentors in subsequent administrations of the program. This creates a culture of continuous learning, development, and opportunity - something which is especially appealing to younger workers (personal communication, Denise Bober, SVP, HR, The Breakers Palm Beach, December 22, 2016).

In addition to the shifts in talent pools, the very manner in which work gets done has also evolved and requires adjustments in the way we conceptualize, design, and implement development opportunities for all enterprise audiences. Work is carried out, more and more, by teams-- self-directed or otherwise, technology is leveraged in ways we could never have imagined, resources from outside the property or brand are being relied on more frequently, decision-making and autonomy are being pushed down to lower rungs in the organization, just to name a few. Consequently, leadership development professionals and senior leaders in the hospitality space are having substantive conversations regarding the next generation of requisite skill sets and mind-set shifts, and the corresponding developmental experiences that will reliably provide, sharpen, and sustain them.

What follows is a summary of best practices which hospitality professionals should consider leveraging to develop employees for leadership roles and best position their organizations for sustained success in the marketplace.

Understand the Development Needs of the Target Audiences (or Know Your 'Guests' Needs)

The design of a robust leadership development strategy-one that ensures the optimization of a company's learning and leadership development experiences in pursuit of building and maintaining a pipeline of future leaders, requires alignment between its enterprise-level strategic objectives, its human capital agenda and,

finally, its employee development needs. What are the knowledge enhancements, skill building, and/or mindset shifts required to propel the organization? Furthermore, well-articulated learning objectives associated with each piece of developmental programming must be tied back directly to these needs. Learning objectives that are too vague, too numerous, or too lofty will sub-optimize developmental programming and ensure lukewarm results. Whether developmental experiences are being designed for GMs, a cadre of global finance directors, or large swaths of first-time supervisors, it is critical that program learning objectives be clear and that programming content is appropriate and of the highest quality.

Leverage an Organizing Framework (or Use a Map to Inform the Itinerary)

Many companies base their programming content on validated leadership competency or capability models. While there are a number of accepted ways to design, develop and validate such models, two general categories of constructs tend to emerge, including interpersonal capabilities (e.g., relationship building, influencing, managing change) and those classified as functional/technical (e.g., hospitality marketing, asset management, capital budgeting). Both types have long served to inform the content of developmental programming and will continue to do so. Competency models make it easier to articulate learning objectives for those responsible for designing, curating, and/or purchasing development programming. Competency models also create the opportunity for a common organizational language around behaviors and performance expectations to take hold. For these reasons alone, it is recommended that they be employed to inform program design. Unfortunately, as Ed Evans, CHRO at The Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, correctly points out, 'too many organizations simply don't have the extreme discipline required to leverage a competency model and its offshoot tools and processes in order to reap the associated benefits' (personal communication, Ed Evans, CHRO, The Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, December 21, 2016).

Include Relevant Context (or Understand the Local Conditions)

Beyond the competency model and the recognition of differential needs of various organizational audiences, development strategy and program design must include the detailing and embedding of elements of the business context. Weaving business context in will optimize the chance that program participants will be engaged, recognize the relevancy of the material and the experience, and have a seamless time 'transferring the training' back to the job. The inclusion of action learning projects borne of current business challenges as part of a developmental curriculum is illustrative of this approach. Providing an opportunity to stretch muscles that were awakened in a traditional instructor-led workshop on an actual business problem is an invaluable developmental experience. Additionally, having senior leaders play an active role in programming as 'leaders as teachers' is another technique many companies employ to provide the business context necessary to round out programming and bring it to life for participants. Program alumni as well as senior leaders are often tapped to serve in this important role.

Choose Program Content and Elements Carefully (or Create an Engaging, Impactful, and Memorable Experience)

Like a good carpenter, one should be keenly aware of all the tools and materials available to construct impactful learning and leadership development architectures and programming. This holds for a two-hour online self-directed learning path focused on a single topic (e.g., managing change), delivered via the company LMS, for a targeted learner (e.g., first-level supervisor), or for a year-long syllabus-driven, blended, cohort-based program for a cadre of Senior Vice Presidents or GMs. Here, it is helpful to engage in purposeful thinking and abide by the old master craftsmen's adage to 'choose the right tool for the job' - the goal, regardless of the targeted audience, is to construct an optimal combination of content paired with the most appropriate set of facilitative delivery mechanisms in order to produce impactful developmental programming.

A recognition that everyone learns in different ways is also important and dictates that programming include a variety of content types. Organizations are taking advantage of the myriad asset alternatives available, including articles, book chapters, videos, blogs, e-learning solutions (e.g., Harvard ManageMentor), worksheets/guides, case studies, short application exercises, assessments, inventories, simulations, action learning projects, and full turnkey programming (open enrollment; customized) offered by the likes of Harvard Business Publishing and Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration. When considering the optimal combination of these available assets and potential length of a development experience, careful consideration must be given to the program's learning objectives, audience learning styles, time constraints, as well as available delivery mediums and facilities (e.g., LMS, Web Ex platform, classroom/conference room facilities), and other resources (e.g., designers, instructors, moderators, external subject matter experts/thought leaders, senior organization leaders, program alumni, mentors, executive sponsors).

Incorporate Bite-Sized Learning (or Think Buffet Grazing Instead of Formal Banquet Dining)

Recently, there has been a noticeable shift to more 'bite-sized' or 'burst' learning. This refers to the curation of small pieces of learning content (e.g., 2-10 minute videos, articles, online lessons) made available for targeted audiences, as single units or 'chunked' pieces found in short syllabus-driven micro- or burst experiences. Modern-day learners can work on any platform, switching back from their mobile device to their desktop, anytime to engage with the learning material. Such 'snackable' content is easy to consume, increasing a learner's psychological engagement and optimizing the chance for retention and more immediate application. Both Mellwig of Two Roads Hospitality and Bober from The Breakers Palm Beach, shared with me that their organizations have both been moving in this direction. This is largely in response to wanting to meet their learners 'where they are' and give them what they need at the most opportune time and in the context of their work.

With this push toward shorter 'bursts' of learning has come a corresponding move away from heavy reliance on traditional standalone instructor-led one- or two-day workshop 'training' events. Increasingly, face-to-face (F2F) sessions are being embedded into more integrated and robust, developmental experiences, such as cohort-based, blended programming. These F2F 'anchor' sessions are now often taking the form of a program kickoff to aid strong context setting and participant networking opportunities, and/or, as a capstone event, where a cohort program is closed out, often with a review of program takeaways, action learning project presentations and judging, and potentially the awarding of completion certificates.

Ensure a Level of Prescription, Collective Learning, and High Fidelity (or Stick to the Itinerary, Consider Traveling with a Group, and Engage with the 'Locals')

There is a shift afoot to transition to more of a prescribed blended approach to development, often incorporating the use of technology to create longer, integrated, virtual learning cohort experiences. This represents a deliberate attempt to move more of the 'learning and development' out of the classroom and back into the business, within the context and confines of 'real work'. This approach is referred to as 'flipping the classroom' and focuses on systematically providing opportunities throughout the learning experience for practice or application, reflection, and receipt of feedback, back on the job. Small and large group work is typically embedded into these learning experiences to help participants collectively make meaning of the learning content. Today's technology also allows individuals working in remote locations around the globe to seamlessly join in on the learning experience, without the expense of flying to an onsite location. This type of programming typically runs as short as 4-6 weeks and as long as 6-8 months.

In the end, there is great variety in development approaches and content available to build new or complement existing programming. Just a few are listed below and should be considered when designing development experiences.

- Self-directed online work

- Small study group work (e.g., article review and discussion, case study, simulations)
- Synchronous live moderated virtual events (e.g., case study or simulation debriefs, topic-relevant internal or external expert lecturers) leveraging technology platforms
- Syllabus-driven, cohort-based, blended learning experiences
- F2F workshop sessions
- Action learning or business impact projects
- Mentor-mentee dyads
- Inventories/assessments
- Senior leaders as teachers
- Open enrolment, online university certificate programs
- Professional conferences
- 'Gamification'

Invest Differentially and Measure (or Spend Wisely and Move Past the Guest Satisfaction Survey)

This treatment would be incomplete without stating the obvious which is that there are typically limited funds earmarked for employee development. As such, it is critical that employee development needs are well understood and that the 'right' programming is designed, curated, and delivered, at the appropriate time. It is imperative that you know your audiences. Is the goal simply informing or educating at a high level? Are deep-seated mind-set shifts required of certain groups? Is skill building paramount? Do headier or more complex topics need to be covered? How large is a particular sub-population? - Hundreds, thousands? Will the need to scale come into play, globally? Answers to these questions and knowledge of the tools, approaches, and resources available will help decision makers prioritize and place educated bets likely to produce real returns on their development dollars. The ability to reliably assess a return on training investments implies the existence and implementation of a measurement strategy. While many organizations still only collect 'satisfaction' (Level 1) measures and maybe immediate post-training knowledge (Level 2) assessments, some are venturing into behavioral change (Level 3) measurement and moving past simple learner self-assessment, and incorporating manager-level ratings of both pre- and post-training job performance. Some companies are even pursuing Level 4 measurement, looking specifically at unit- and/or organizational-level business metrics and drawing conclusions about the role development played. There is certainly much work to do in this area as having an informed conversation about return on developmental programming without reliable and valid measurement is an unlikelihood, at best, and at worst, misguided.

Enhance Your Programming (or Turn Your Vacation into an Adventure)

Many of the aforementioned elements are currently being leveraged, to some degree or another, even within the myriad in-house hotel management training programs geared toward hospitality program graduates. Cross-department rotations ensuring operational exposure, project work, the provision of a coach or mentor, access to senior leadership, instructor-led training, and networking opportunities are all built into this type of programming to position these newcomers for future success. Moving forward, I suspect there will be a concerted effort on the part of hotel L&D professionals to inject (or complement) this type of programming with more 'bite-sized' content, along with more opportunities for context-rich, cohort-based, blended learning with a heavy focus on business-driven small group application work.

The ultimate objective, at this point, should be clear -- to design developmental experiences that play out as seamless, intuitive journeys for learners, where content is judiciously included and organized in a way that learning, and the opportunity to leverage learning, builds through the entire experience; where facilitative delivery modalities and individual and group work are optimally mixed, with a heavy focus on systematic application, reflection and feedback.

A Recap of Best Practices (or the Ultimate Packing List)

- Ensure tight alignment between enterprise objectives, human capital agenda and, learning and leadership development requirements and needs
- Ensure you know your audiences - their needs and preferred learning styles
- Employ a competency model as a guide to capture, categorize and inform your portfolio of programming
- Ensure your programming's learning objectives are clear and not overreaching
- Embed business and organizational context into your learning and development experiences
- Ensure your programming allows for most of the 'learning' to take place in the context of one's work; flip the classroom
- Leverage technology
- Incorporate 'bite-sized' or 'burst' learning, where it makes sense
- Ensure there is sufficient prescription built into your programming's curricula
- Ensure that programming has an active executive or senior level sponsor
- Consider all approaches at your disposal (e.g., self-directed learning paths, moderator-led cohort blended experiences, small group work, application exercises, action learning projects, university sponsored open enrollment certificate programs, conference attendance)
- Consider all assets/resources at your disposal (e.g., online learning lessons, videos, articles, blogs, case studies, simulations, expert speakers/thought leaders/university faculty, leaders as teachers, program alumni)
- Search for a balanced blend between in-house and externally built and delivered programming
- Devise and follow through on a measurement strategy to assess some form of return on investment

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