



## Best practices for diversity in the lodging industry

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In this day and age, it's pretty much a given that employers in every industry should – and do – strive for diversity in their workforces. In fact, diversity has become one of the biggest buzzwords of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But even if it seems that everyone already knows that they should pursue diversity, it's still worthwhile to reflect on the benefits of a diverse workforce, and talk about best practices for getting there.

### What does “diversity” mean, anyway?

Diversity is often thought of as the practice of hiring and promoting individuals of different races or ethnicities. While this is certainly an important part of the equation, there is much more to diversity than simply employing people of different races. A truly diverse workforce is one in which employees are valued for the different perspectives they bring to the table – perspectives based on their individual backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation or gender identification, socioeconomic background, place of geographic origin, marital or parental status, and so much more. Every employee is an amalgamation of different characteristics and traits. An employer that truly values diversity will encourage *all* employees to contribute their own unique perspective and wisdom to the workplace.

### Why is diversity important for hoteliers?

There are many reasons why hoteliers should focus on diversity in their hiring and employment practices:

- Diversity helps employee morale. When people believe that their employer values their differences, and is committed to hiring and promoting them fairly while still respecting their different backgrounds and experiences, they are generally more motivated and more loyal workers.
- Having a diverse workforce ensures the presence of different perspectives and ideas. When a staff member uses the benefit of his own background to improve hotel procedures or contributes to discussion of workplace practices, hoteliers can only benefit.
- A hotel that builds a reputation for being committed to diversity may very well find itself a popular choice for job applicants. A hotel that shows that it values diversity will have its pick of the brightest and most talented employees.
- A diverse staff will help a hotel better understand and serve the needs of its guests, who are probably a diverse group themselves! A happy guest is frequently a loyal guest, and one who will tell friends and family about their experiences – good and bad.

## How can hoteliers best promote diversity in the workplace?



- *Get leadership involved.* A commitment to diversity starts at the top, with the general manager or human resources manager. Leadership's participation must extend beyond mere "lip service," though. The GM or HR manager should be visible to employees and vocal about the importance of a diverse workforce. Some managers choose to hold "town hall" style meetings where they discuss diversity issues with employees. However, when hotel leaders choose to interact with their employees on diversity issues, make sure that top management is engaged!
- *Network!* There are plenty of organizations dedicated to the promotion of diversity in the hotel industry. Senior management – especially GMs and HR managers – should seek out these organizations and get involved with them. They could end up referring great new employees to the hotel. If nothing else, it always helps for hoteliers to be plugged into industry organizations. And who knows? You might get some great ideas for how to better serve your guests by talking to organization members with experience at different properties!
- *Solicit opinions.* While they may not speak up on their own, many employees are a wealth of good ideas, and all Management needs to do is ask! Employees are in the best position to tell Management whether they are satisfied in the workplace, how to improve working conditions, and what the hotel can do to better serve its guests. Many employees want to "fly beneath the radar," so it is important that Management create a safe space for them to express their opinions and give suggestions. This can be done by arranging a confidential hotline for employees to call with questions or suggestions about diversity issues, conducting a "workplace satisfaction audit" with anonymous employee surveys, maintaining a secure website where employees can offer suggestions or alert Management to problems, or holding a "town hall" meeting where questions and suggestions are discussed, but the identity of the employee raising the question is kept confidential. Employees are the best source of information about their own satisfaction and often want to be consulted about how to improve the hotel's services.
- *Set goals.* Whether your hotel is a chain or branded property with dreams of further expansion or a small independent inn where employees can emphasize the personal touch, as a lodging manager you have goals and a strategic vision. Make diversity part of that vision! Some companies set up diversity "task forces" made up of managers and employees who are committed to making a diverse workforce a priority. Others include diversity in their mission or vision statements.
- *Be accountable.* It is not enough to just talk about the benefits of diversity and ask for employees' suggestions as to how the hotel can do better. Management needs to stay accountable for keeping the commitment to diversity a priority. Make diversity a topic of discussion during management meetings. Have managers ask each other, "What are we doing to promote diversity in the hotel? How are our strategies working, and how are they not working? What are some concrete ways we can improve?" Commit to checking in and asking these questions periodically, and to implementing whatever suggestions come out of the conversation.
- *Train!* Keep diversity issues at the forefront of everyone's minds by holding regular training sessions. Get feedback from attendees about how training sessions can be improved and what topics they would like to discuss in the future. And of course, it is vital to keep up-to-date on the most basic employee relations training, like anti-discrimination and anti-harassment training for both managers and staff.
- *Don't skimp on the intangibles.* One way a hotel can show its employees that it values diversity is through employee benefit programs. Workplace wellness initiatives – such as paying for gym memberships or conducting health and wellness trainings – show employees that Management wants them to be healthy. Providing child care for employees who are parents, or resources for elder care for those with aging parents, communicates to employees that they are valued. And after all, isn't valuing employees in different situations of life what diversity is all about?
- *Put your money where your mouth is.* At the end of the day, all the talk in the world won't convince employees that a hotelier values diversity if the talk doesn't translate into action. Employees need to see real results – they need to see that people of all different races, religions, and cultural backgrounds are being hired and promoted within the hotel. And while it is important to get feedback from employees about their satisfaction in the workplace and their suggestions for how to improve the hotel's practices (both personnel and guest service practices), sooner or later the hotel needs to take the *best* ideas and actually implement them. If employees hear constant talk, but don't see real action, they will soon stop believing that the hotel is truly committed to diversity.

In today's global society, diversity is more important than ever. Hoteliers should stay at the forefront of diversity issues, both for employee morale purposes and because a diverse staff can best serve a diverse pool of guests. While no two hotels are exactly

the same, taking concrete steps to show employees that they are valued and respected for their differences can only lead to a more hospitable workplace! ✧

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