



People Skills

by Brian Carlsen

Top ten things that hotel managers do to lose their best employees

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Yes, some of your most talented (and seemingly dedicated) hotel employees may leave you for financially greener pastures, but many others will stay longer and excel when they have a great boss and a superior working environment. Experience has shown us that there are some great managers out there who are able to successfully retain their most talented and mission-critical performers, and *some that are not so great*. Much can be learned (by what not to do) from these ineffective hotel managers.

Here is a top ten list of practices that worst hotel managers believe or do to lose their best employees:

Number 10 – Don’t hold supervisors accountable for turnover. Poor hotel managers believe that when employees leave it was unavoidable anyway. They may be in denial that talented workers may indeed take other job offers for the sole reason that their direct supervisor is bad at supervising. Many of these managers end up doing nothing about employees leaving, even when it is the direct result of poor practices of the ex-employee’s supervisor.

Number 9 – Push adminis-trivia and grunt work downhill. Each property’s best people want to excel every day while having the resources and room to make it happen. They want to be valued and treated with respect. They want to contribute in meaningful ways. One measure of this is being given responsibility and reasonable autonomy in doing important work. Ineffective managers forget this, and allow trivial administrative tasks, the most unappealing jobs, and overly complicated processes to get in the way of their staff doing more meaningful work.

Number 8 – Stress the importance of long hours and sacrifice. Less effective hotel managers fool themselves into thinking that their best performers and high potential future leaders are those employees who work the longest hours, including double or back-to-back shifts and excessive overtime, and are most willing to sacrifice outside interests to advance their career. These managers act as if “life-work balance” is never a concern for the truly dedicated, career-minded professional. In the minds of these managers, the only outcomes of long hours and high demands are to get short-term results and cull out weak performers; not to burn out (or drive out) the best. This is a management approach ultimately doomed to failure.

Number 7 – Don’t ask, don’t listen. The worst hotel managers avoid initiating employee feedback. They believe that “what you don’t know won’t hurt you.” Getting employee input about their issues may raise expectations that Management is obligated to actually do something. These ineffective managers tend to believe that if a workplace issue is important enough to someone on the job, then the subordinate should either go to Human Resources, or bring it to the manager’s attention after the day’s work is done. (See Number 8.)

Number 6 – Pay everybody the same and keep it that way. Less effective managers act as if it is not worth the effort to sustain a competitive compensation strategy based on area benchmarks or retaining key performers in key positions through effective pay and benefits. These managers may hope that a *Pizza Mondays* program or *Summer Barbecues* will be sufficient to keep them happy—even during salary freezes.

Number 5 – Recognize failures rather than successes. It is true that we often learn by our mistakes. But poor managers publicly announce the mistakes of others and spend their time blaming and documenting. And to avoid risk, they make sure the team knows that no one will have the chance to make the same mistake twice. In this environment, successes, insights and consistent contributions go unnoticed.

Number 4 – Count on the grapevine to disseminate information. Weak hotel managers discount the importance of sharing timely and engaging information such as upcoming organizational or departmental changes, company news, individual and

team successes, new employees coming on board, and positive feedback from customers. For some poor managers, the subconscious belief behind sparse communication is that information is power. They believe giving it away weakens their position and leverage. Actually, the opposite is true.

Number 3 – Keep them guessing about what is expected, then slam them. Poor hotel managers disregard the fact that people want to know how they are doing and don't wish to underperform. When performance expectations are clear between managers and their team members, it is far easier to communicate and accept feedback during performance conversations. But due to busy workloads and sporadic feedback practices, many workers bemoan the fact that they don't get any feedback unless it is bad.

Number 2 – Stretch 'em until it hurts. Less effective hotel managers may get a kick out of throwing talented people into the deep end of the pool with limited resources or minimal training to see if they will sink or swim. These managers, when confronted about this practice, will hide behind axioms such as "Everyone has to pay their dues", "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger", or "No pain, no gain". Such trial by fire techniques are insensitive and demoralizing to employees and only perpetuate similar sadistic tendencies in the workplace.

And the **Number 1** thing that worst hotel managers believe or do to lose their best people...

Hire the wrong people and keep the worst performers. Worst hotel managers may believe that high turnover is a way to get rid of "dead wood" while hoping that enough good people stay. They forget that poor performers will work with anyone (both poor and high performers), but good people like to work with other good people, and have little tolerance for incompetence.

So, what do great hotel managers do to hold on to their best people? Our experience shows that they:

1. Hire and retain great people to build an environment of mutual team member respect and appreciation.
2. Support and develop their people effectively, especially during stretch assignments.
3. Provide clear performance expectations and provide ongoing, constructive feedback and coaching.
4. Communicate persistently.
5. Recognize successes and stellar performance.
6. Sustain a data-driven compensation approach.
7. Listen to their people and act on what they learn.
8. Provide alternative work arrangements to aid life-work balance.
9. Provide guidance and resources, and then get out of the way for work to get done.
10. Create a management culture of talent retention.

Ten salient lessons for hotel managers derived from ten poor practices. ✧

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