



Your greatest asset

Whether it is through bringing in experienced staff or training up your existing employees, improving a hotel's greatest asset is vital

It is rarely easy to replace a work colleague. And in a transient business such as hospitality, employees move from establishment to establishment regularly, meaning that F&B managers and executive chefs will nearly always have a job to fill in their restaurant or kitchen.

This can be very disruptive to the flow of a working team and that means it is imperative to get a high quality replacement in as soon as possible. But this is not always easy.

Paul Mannerling, principal of HIT Chef Academy, says that an Employment & Skills report published early in 2015 showed that up to 50% of kitchens were struggling to fill vacancies, and the problem covered all industry levels from fast food outlets to destination hotel restaurants.

"There are two key areas of skills shortage affecting the hospitality industry," he says. "The first is the well documented shortage of trained and skilled chefs in the UK. You may not be able to switch on the TV without seeing a celebrity chef, but they are harder to come by in hotel kitchens. Even top chefs, such as Tom Kerridge, have

taken to Twitter to fill chef vacancies. The other skill shortage is in the area of first line supervisory management – this is the team leaders who work alongside frontline staff to deliver to customers."

Lindsay Southward, group people development director for the Malmaison Hotel Du Vin group, says the key is to find employees that have the same core values as the company.

"Finding talented, passionate and driven chefs is our main focus at the moment," she says. "We conduct competency-based interviews around profit, product and people. These are the core elements of our business."

"Having said that, the most important thing we look for in a person is personality and attitude. We always look for individuals with infectious personalities as hospitality is

a people business – the rest we will teach them because there are some things you can't teach!"

With the constant movement of employees and available positions, bringing in experienced workers from other venues can be essential, but there are also disadvantages to constantly changing staff

in positions that need experience, as Steven Pike, managing director of HospitalityGEM, explains.

"In short, the pro is the experience and the con is that they may bring behaviours that don't fit your culture," he says. "The most important thing is to attract the right personalities and then

to have a thorough period of induction to get them living and breathing your values quickly."

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Southward agrees: "Experience is always advantageous, but this can have its pitfalls. People can become conditioned by a brand and as a result become set in their ways. This is why we like to find a balance between experience and personality."

One way to handle the recruitment issue is to promote from within, and Pike believes that this can send a positive message to the workforce about career development.

"If people can see their colleagues developing and progressing, it can act as an incentive for them to work towards the same aim," he notes.

"There's also the added advantage that existing staff already know how your company works, your culture and what is expected of them, meaning any induction period in a new role is likely to be shorter and easier."

Southward also believes that promoting from within can only be a positive.

"We work hard to put people into the right position, in the right team, in the right property and, most importantly, with the right support and development to ensure they succeed," she says. "When you

give employees the chance to grow and develop within your brand, this creates greater loyalty, deepens understanding and builds pride as well as showing individuals a clear career path."

TRAINING

Having employees that are readymade and experienced enough to step into the void should a senior member of the team leave is not always a given. In these cases, and important in the development of staff, it is essential to offer training.

"Developing the knowledge and experience of staff not only ensures delivery of the highest quality service, it also allows them to steadily progress up the career ladder," says Mannering. "The benefits of this

include longer-term staff retention, motivated teams and increased loyalty. It also makes sound economic sense as recruitment and training costs for new employees can be minimised."

Roles and jobs within hotel F&B venues can be very diverse, from pastry chef to bar manager, so training staff with the right skills to progress with their careers is not straightforward.

"Foodservice providers have enough on their plates - literally," says John Hyde, executive chairman of HIT Training. "Delivering specialist training for staff members isn't a one-off task, it's something which

takes time and needs to be invested in to ensure that a hotel is running to its optimum. This is where external training providers can add real value, by taking the time-intensive

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process of putting together tailored training courses away from operators.”

Andrew Mosedale, HR manager at the Brend Hotel Group based in the West Country, is working with HIT to offer the Level 4 Higher Apprenticeship to further improve the management skills within the company.

“The greater knowledge and understanding of the industry gained through a management qualification such as this is intrinsically valuable to both the employee and the employer as it means we can equip our junior and middle managers with the necessary skills for success in this highly competitive environment,” he explains.

“That in turn leads to greater individual engagement and increased motivation to consistently deliver the very highest standards of customer care, while the Brend Group benefits not least from improved staff retention.”

“Encouraging our staff to improve their skills set and supporting them through apprenticeships and training programmes underlines our commitment to help them

further develop their own careers,” he adds.

Hyde also believes it is beneficial to have an external provider rather than conducting training in-house.

“Outside training providers can take an objective view and offer a greater breadth of experience, having worked with many different companies and witnessed other ways of working,” he notes.

“In-house staff who provide training may benefit from knowing the business inside out, but they won’t necessarily have the tools or expertise needed to guarantee that staff members receive the best training that will not only enhance their skills but also help to grow a business.”

Pike warns, however, that buying in training can be expensive and not all outside providers understand the

values of an individual company.

“Where you can miss out, unless you have a very close relationship with the provider, is in getting across the cultural differences that make your business what it is and that get it noticed among the competition,” he says. “Some of this may come from the passion of people who work for you.”

Southward says that Malmaison Hotel Du Vin believes that a balance between both internal and external training is very important to a person’s development.

“Learning from industry professionals is crucial as it helps our trainees see how these external elements translate into our day-to-day business,” she notes. “In-house training is equally important as we are able to create tailored training programmes as well as one-on-one coaching.

“We have excellent employee retention and we believe some of those reasons are because we work closely with all our employees to give them personalised development plans as well as ensuring they have a good work/life balance along with a generous benefits package.”

Southward adds that it is important to constantly be looking at the pipeline of talent, asking where the next heads of department are coming from.

“We believe in the importance of developing and growing talent from within while balancing this against new blood,” he says. “Agencies who really understand your brand can produce some really good candidates. However this only comes from working closely with them.”

Following an extensive report by the

UK Commission for Employment and Skills, Hyde identifies the stats that prove training up your employees to be a worthwhile investment.

He says: “With research finding that businesses which don’t train are two times more likely on average to go out of business than those that do, it is

important that operators find the right training programme to match the needs of their establishment and safeguard the future of their hotel.”

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