

Chapter 9

Craft-Based Learning: Practical and Theoretical Guidance for Teaching and Training in Hospitality Education

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ABSTRACT

Practical training is without doubt one of the most important areas in hospitality education as it is where students are introduced to the basics of the industry, while stimulating their curiosity and passion towards customer service, as well as instilling in them the entrepreneurial mindset needed to succeed in a very competitive and dynamic industry. This chapter describes an approach to practical training, not only by looking at the theoretical and practical subjects taught during the first semesters of the program, but also by understanding how the new generation of young adults learn and how we can help them develop different skillsets as they continue their education. From a practical perspective, Craft-Based Learning (CBL) is fundamental in getting young adults ready for a challenging international career in hospitality, as they will develop knowledge and hard and soft skills through a “learning by doing” approach.

INTRODUCTION

The dramatic expansion of the hospitality industry in recent years maximizes opportunities not only for hotels and restaurants, but also for hotel schools looking to prepare students for successful careers in the industry.

With an increasing array of options supported by innovations in technology and the increase in travel, “guests are nowadays becoming more discerning, expecting greater value and looking for truly meaningful hospitality experiences” (Camilleri & Noll, 2014, p.1). Magnificent facilities, state-of-the-art technologies and excellent customer relationships are no longer enough of a competitive advantage for companies looking to foster guest loyalty and brand presence in a very dynamic market. Engaging

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and retaining employees becomes also a priority, skillful, motivated and innovative personnel capable of going beyond their call of duty to anticipate and satisfy needs and expectations of the so-called guests of the experience economy.

Hospitality is a very practical-oriented industry full of *savoir-faire*, tradition and glamour. Young students from the generation of instant-gratification join hotel schools and universities hoping to fast track their education and quickly become hotel general managers. Faculty in this field very often has extensive academic experience combined with some years of industry experience. They tend to have come up through the ranks (like hoteliers of the past) and joined the academic world more than a decade ago (when there was little technology involved), making them slightly disconnected with the industry and with the learning styles of newer generations.

How should we taught subjects that largely involve practical skills (often called “entry-level jobs”), such as serving people, cleaning bathrooms, handling guest complaints, cooking meals, clearing dirty plates, handling wastage, pouring cocktails, etc., to young students that are clearly surfacing the practical training only because is part of the academic program, so they can progress into more managerial subjects ?

The challenge is for hotel management schools to adapt teaching structures to learning styles empowered by technology, but still be capable of awakening students’ passion for the industry through captivating practical activities. It is all about shifting from being deliverers of content to orchestrators of learning and engagement, focusing less on transmission of knowledge and more on developing aptitudes (how to do) and attitudes (how to be). To paraphrase a recognized educator: “If you teach me relevant skills and knowledge of my time, I will have a job today. If you instill in me imagination, drive and the ability to adapt to a future I cannot anticipate, I will have relevant jobs for a lifetime”. (Cator, 2013)

In this chapter, hospitality leaders’ expectations are looked at in terms of graduates’ theoretical knowledge, but also in terms of practical competencies and behaviors that these future hoteliers will need in order to better integrate with the labor market, grow professionally and contribute to the industry’s evolution. Throughout the chapter, the need for a constant connection between the industry and hotel schools is reiterated time and again from different perspectives. This chapter also contains a review of the best practices that some of our hospitality institutions put in place in order to ensure a relevant and meaningful practical training program.

Finally, the chapter highlights some future research directions that will allow institutions and industry leaders to contribute to the constant evolution of training and development in hospitality.

START WITH A MISSION STATEMENT

Practical training needs to take place in an environment as close as possible to the real-life scenario. Throughout different campuses, hotel schools have the chance to run operations very similar to real hospitality facilities with rooms, restaurants, bars, receptions, banqueting areas, etc., which gives students the opportunity to immerse themselves - from the very beginning of their professional life - into the daily routine they will most likely maintain throughout their career in hospitality.

Synergies between academic and operational aspects of the practical training department are therefore crucial in order to maximize learning opportunities for the students and, at the same time, run a cost-efficient operation. This needs to be clearly reflected in a department’s mission statement.

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