

Chapter 1

What Attracts Workers to an Industry?

The Impact of Following a Calling in Hospitality

ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the dimensions of attraction that factor into workers making choices regarding pursuit of a career within a discipline of preference. Through the process of both professional experiences and extensive research conducted to prepare this publication, the author shares learned insight—balanced with a meta-analysis of recent literature—on what attracts individuals to the hospitality sector, profiles the characteristics of a 21st century hotel workforce, and explores the dimensions associated with front-line hospitality empowerment. The narrative concludes with an overview of the ensuing chapters within this publication and how each focus on a different impact of discovery around the idea nucleus of understanding the challenges, needs, and motivational opportunities for front-line hotel employees.

INTRODUCTION

A research initiative is a personal endeavor that takes place in a professional environment. It always starts with curiosity and at least one question (although one always hopes that there are several). Curiosity isn't an emotion that can be manufactured on demand. At its purest, it is an inquiry of passion that

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-2528-2.ch001

resonates with a researcher on a fundamental level. The best research focuses on a topic, no matter how broad, that connects with a researcher on a personal and emotional level. That said, what is it about hotels that connects with the author of this study? Why makes a hotel special enough to be the focus of such attention?

From a young age, the author maintained a fascination with hotels. A hotel always seemed like an exciting and fun place. They were clean, populated by professional people who were smiling and happy, and they often featured bright colors, fun activities and adventures everywhere. Their architecture and design were often unique and distinct from normal everyday experiences like grocery stores or department stores. Granted, the vast majority of hotels visited by the author at a younger age were usually connected to a summer vacation experience, and leisure hotels are known for creating an extension of the fun times as a business strategy. What kid understands that context though? When you go on vacation and the first thing you see upon arrival is a magical happy place with food, color, music, games, contests, prizes, your own fluffy bed AND a fully stocked mini fridge with the best unhealthy snacks possible what is a young kid supposed to believe? Make no mistake, the learning phenomenon of primacy worked very effectively into the author's perceptions and the magic produced by hotels maintained an almost mythical quality from that point on.

As the author grew older and had opportunities to stay at hotels that weren't associated with an amusement park vacation, the broader perspective gained from the experience did not dilute the affinity for the profession. That fascination and affinity was leveraged into a front desk job early in the author's career. At the time of being hired, the job was thought of as nothing less than the very stuff that dreams are made of. As is often the case when one thinks they're fulfilling their dreams, every sugary happy and subjective mythical perception came crashing down as fast as can be possibly conceived. The hotel wasn't a magical place after all, it was just a place of employment like an office or retail store. After working at the hotel throughout the college years, the author left the hospitality industry after graduation and sought employment in industries not forever tainted by the rose-colored glasses of childhood.

And yet, the fascination for the industry didn't disappear and – if anything – it got stronger over time. The inquiry of how the industry manages to survive (or even thrive) has continued to be present throughout a variety of jobs, companies and industries (no hotels though...). In exploring the body of knowledge associated with hotel front-line employees, one finds that there's

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