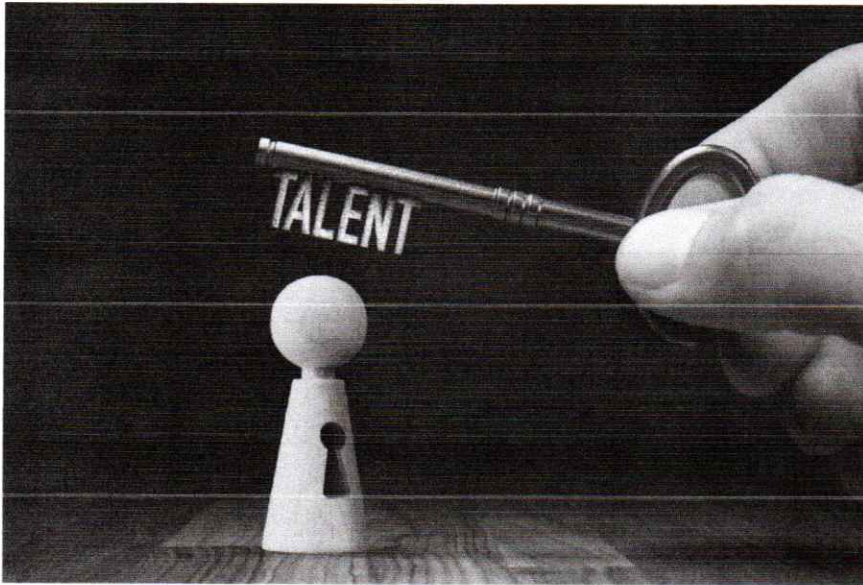


Strategies for Hiring and Retaining Top Talent in the Changing Hospitality Landscape

By [Cynthia Schuler](#) Principal, IntegriStar HR Consulting | January 2024



It is crucial to attract and retain top talent in the hospitality industry.

In an article in Forbes Advisor entitled, "[Key HR Statistics and Trends in 2023](#)" by Kristy Snyder, Cassie Bottorff, and Brette Sember, J.D. it is stated that the leisure and hospitality industry has a separation rate of 79% "when it comes to annual average employment."

That means that companies in the hospitality industry must audit their current recruitment process, review their salary structure and benefit offerings, and commit to identifying and offering learning opportunities for

current and future employees.

Recruitment

The first step for Human Resources departments to take to ensure that they are attracting top talent is to audit their current recruitment process. Evaluating the recruitment process in the areas of planning, sourcing, and screening and selecting candidates will highlight successes and opportunities for improvement.

Planning

In the planning stage of recruitment, one of the most important documents to develop is the job description. The job description is a powerful tool and represents the company's brand and reputation. As stated in "[Hospitality Industry Recruitment Strategy and Key Challenges](#)" in July of 2022 "In order to promote your company's brand, all hospitality recruiters must highlight the uniqueness of the company, the intangibles that make the brand superior to the competitors." Why? Because "This helps in an immediate increase in quality and quantity of applications." So if the goal is to promote the company's brand and highlight what sets the company apart from others in the same industry, it must be clear and concise.

The format of the job description should be consistent. Bold, underlining, CAPS, and bullets should be consistent throughout the job description. The content in a job description is just as important. Understanding preferences versus requirements is key in today's market. For example, how critical is it to have worked in the specific hospitality space for which the company is recruiting, or is it just preferred? How critical is it to have 3-5 years of experience? Is 1-2 years of experience sufficient? Can the company train someone with transferrable skills? For example, can the position be filled with someone who has outstanding customer

service skills with no experience in the hospitality industry? Being clear and concise about requirements and preferences is important and could make a difference in expanding the candidate pool.

Education is another area to consider in a job description. Is it essential to have a college degree to perform the essential duties of the position or will a candidate qualify, for example, if they have several years of experience providing customer service in a position in a similar industry? What about a completely different industry? It is critical to identify what level of education is really needed to perform the essential functions of the job for which the company is recruiting. While it is understandable that some positions may require specialized training or a specific degree, it is one of those questions that needs to be flushed out – especially when trying to attract talent in an industry with high turnover. It is important to remember in a tight market that relaxing an educational degree requirement, if possible, will expand the talent pool. A requirement versus a preference could cost the company a great candidate.

Sourcing Candidates

Reviewing current recruiting sources and compiling metrics with respect to the number of hires from those sources and the turnover percentage from those sources will assist recruiters in identifying gaps. Specific sources may work for one type of position but not all positions. Researching and diversifying sourcing methods to cast a wide net for top talent is important for companies who are competing for the same talent in a tight market with skill shortages.

Social media is a popular method of sourcing candidates. Recruiters should leverage the power of social media. Jobvite's 2020 annual reports states that LinkedIn is the most commonly used social media platform for recruiting with 72% of recruiters using it to post job openings. And while LinkedIn may be popular among recruiters, Facebook, X, Instagram, Twitter, and Glassdoor are also used to source for candidates.

Networking is another method by which to source. Word of mouth and referrals are great ways to identify and attract talent. Recruiters should be networking with peers, when attending career fairs, conferences, and other events. Making connections and building relationships with other professionals is very important in recruiting talent. Word of mouth may land a great candidate, so use networking channels to promote your company, the jobs that are open, and why a candidate should explore your company as opposed to one across the street. Remember, the unique characteristics and the company brand should all be leveraged while networking to attract top talent.

Screening and Selecting Candidates

While recruiters must make good hiring decisions, the length of time it takes to screen and select candidates matters. A few days of delay in a tight talent market could mean losing a great candidate. Recruiters should screen and move swiftly through the interviewing process. Hiring managers should be informed that while they are not encouraged to make bad hiring decisions, they should move quickly and efficiently through the process. If there is a delay in the process at any stage, those candidates who are identified as top talent, and who are actively interviewing, may move on and accept another position or withdraw their candidacy based upon the length of time it takes to get through the process.

Equally important is keeping in touch with candidates throughout the process. During the interview, candidates should be informed about the steps in the process. That is, whether or not there will be multiple interviews, if the interviews will be in-person or take place virtually, and when a decision will be made about the position. If there is a delay for some reason during the process, recruiters should stay in touch with candidates. And when an offer is made, other candidates who have interviewed for a position should not be informed until that offer is accepted in writing and a start date is confirmed. At times, a top candidate may decide there is something about the offer they are not comfortable with, or they may have a competing offer and ultimately accept another position. That is precisely why a signed offer letter with a confirmed start date is needed before other candidates are notified.

Salary and Benefits

In an effort to retain employees, companies in the hospitality industry also need to audit their salary structure and the benefits they offer to employees. Offering a fair and competitive wage is crucial in the hospitality industry, especially when the turnover rate is so high. In addition, understanding the wants and needs of employees is crucial.

As stated in Forbes Advisor's article entitled "[Workplace Benefit Trends By Generations in 2023](#)," written by Belle Wong, J.D., and updated in November of 2023, "Workplace benefits in 2023 are more than just perks on paper. They represent the aspirations, challenges and lived experiences of different generations. And while HR software continues to refine and optimize organizational processes, there's an underlying human story waiting to be told—one that's imperative for organizations to listen closely to so they can align their benefit strategies to their workforce's needs."

And how do companies find out what matters most to their employees – especially in a multi-generational workplace? Surveying employees is one way to discover what matters most to them. Education by way of research (keeping up with benefit trends) is another way to learn what is most important to employees. Why not offer benefits that are meaningful to employees as opposed to offering benefits that employees may not deem important and may not use?

Bonuses, 401(k), and Tuition Reimbursement

Additional retention tools in the hospitality industry are possibly offering sign-on bonuses, 401(k) retirement benefits, and tuition reimbursement. Sign-on bonuses are an incentive for employees to join the team, and the bonus can essentially serve as a "win-win" situation for the employer and the employee if the company requests that the employee stay on board for at least "x" amount of time before receiving that sign-on bonus or by splitting the sign-on bonus payments over a period of time during the first year of employment.

Second, offering a 401(k) plan to employees may be important to those employees who are interested in investing financially for their future. The design of the plan (fully vested immediately versus a vesting schedule), and the amount the company contributes are two important items when evaluating the current plan or researching a future plan.

And finally, tuition reimbursement could be a way to attract and retain top talent. In a Grant Thornton article entitled "[Maximizing hospitality industry talent retention](#)" published on August 3, 2022, Tim Glowa, a principal of Human Capital Services at Grant Thornton stated that "...in one major national food chain, it was uncovered that many employees worked multiple jobs to provide more money to create opportunities for their families. By offering employees a tuition reimbursement they could use both personally and pass on to immediate family members, this benefit addressed the opportunity that higher education could yield for their family. The benefit was also highly differentiated in that it was not offered by competitors.

Furthermore, their employees assigned greater value to this benefit than it cost the company – a company cost-saving benefit." The point is that unless companies ask what is most important to their employees, they will never know.

Flexibility

Flexibility in any industry is important to employees who may be caring for a loved one, who have children who need to be dropped off and picked up at daycare, and for many other reasons. Working shifts in some of the hospitality industry space may cause challenges for some employees. In an article entitled "[Maximizing hospitality industry talent retention](#)," published on August 3, 2022 by Grant Thornton, it states that "...many employees in the restaurant and lodging industries are required to work overtime hours that they don't want to work, mainly due to the staffing shortages mentioned earlier.

One way to help with both recruiting and retention is to clearly state in company policies that employees won't need to work an undesirable number of hours – or that concrete steps are being taken to reduce those hours soon." This is something that companies should consider when designing jobs and thinking about how to attract and retain top talent.

Creating a Positive Culture

It is also important to create an overall positive culture for employees in which they feel they belong from the beginning. Values must align between employer and employee which enables the employee-employer relationship to flourish on a foundation of trust. Companies must promote and display a culture of inclusion to retain top talent, and one of the ways to do this is to create and implement an effective onboarding process.

Onboarding

Transparency and clarity are needed from the beginning of the recruitment process through the entire employee life cycle. But the onboarding process can make or break an employer-employee relationship. The process should be organized and fulfilling for all new employees. The onboarding process should be a continuation of what was represented about the company and the brand during the interview process. It should be smooth, seamless, and inclusive so that new employees feel welcome.

Introductions to department members through a lunch or virtual meeting should occur during the first couple of days of employment. Introductions to others across the company should also be included in the onboarding process. And finally, assigning a buddy to new employees will help the new employee to navigate a new environment and meet others. The focus should be on building a community where employees feel they can share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns with others.

There should also be clarity around policies and procedures during onboarding. New employees should be trained on the "essentials" the first few days on the job. Understanding policies and procedures and what resources are available to aid in a new employee's success is essential.

Training and Development

Another retention tool is to offer professional training and development to employees. If the company is committed to offering its employees an opportunity to learn and grow, the company has a better chance of retaining those employees. Managers especially need continuous professional development and training to build and maintain inclusive and productive departments.

Internal and External Training and Development

Offering internal training opportunities to employees will allow them to improve or refresh skills. One way to provide that opportunity is through online learning. If a company has a Learning Management System, employees can acquire new skills or participate in refresher training on current skills. The new learning or reinforcement will foster growth and have a positive effect on morale and engagement. In Forbes Advisor's article entitled, "[Key HR Statistics and Trends in 2023](#)" by Kristy Snyder, Cassie Bottorff, and Brette Sember, J.D. it is stated that customized learning programs with for employees allows companies to tailor employee skills to exactly what the company needs. The article also states that employees will be more engaged and prepared for career advancement.

And finally, offering external training opportunities to all employees may assist with retention. Sending employees to conferences or supporting a seminar or webinar that will provide employees with essential skills to enable them to perform their job to the best of their ability, shows that the company cares about developing its people. When employees feel that they are valued and that their company has a vested interest in them, there is a better chance of retention.

Conclusion

While there is a challenge in attracting and retaining talent in the hospitality industry, it is possible to gain an edge in attracting top talent. Companies in the hospitality industry can do this by auditing recruiting processes and making adjustments as needed, reviewing and revising salary structure and benefit offerings as necessary, and committing to evaluating, creating and/or maintaining an overall positive organizational culture for all employees. It starts from the top and trickles down, and when the values of the company align with the values of its employees, employees will engage and produce for the company – and stay!



Ms. Schuler

Cynthia Schuler, PHR, SHRM-CP, CPRW has more than twenty years of experience in the human resources and talent management space. During her career, Ms. Schuler has seen the transformation of human resources and has a passion for sharing her experiences to help other human resources professionals nationally and internationally. As the Principal at IntegriStar HR Consulting, she provides organizations with strategic direction and training and development in the areas of talent acquisition and retention, culture and engagement, benefits and compensation administration, employee relations, and diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. Ms. Schuler received her bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland, College Park, MD, and she received her master's degree from Strayer University in Washington, DC. She is a member of the Association of Legal Administrators, the Society for Human Resource Management, and the Professional Association of Resume Writers and Career Coaches. She also has a certificate in Diversity and Inclusion from Cornell University and an Adult Mental Health First Aid certification from the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

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