# What Up-scale and Luxury Hotel Executives Expect for their Brand's Talent Management: An Insight for Hospitality Education

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## ABSTRACT

*At a time when the industry is shrinking and the future is filled with uncertainty, it may be more critical than ever for hospitality education to meet the needs of the industry. Hospitality education continues to speculate where to focus and what to emphasize in the development of effective curriculum relevant to needs of the lodging industry. This research is designed to answer the question of what information should be considered when planning future curriculum. The purpose of this study is to determine what the expectations are of lodging industry executives concerning their talent management. A web-based survey will be used. A statistical analysis of the responses will include performance of frequencies for all skills and competencies with the mean rating and standard deviation used to rank their importance. Results are expected to provide additional insight to hospitality education which will be beneficial in the curriculum planning process.*

**Keywords:** Hospitality education, Talent management, Skills, Competencies

## INTRODUCTION

As hotel executives search for the kind of personnel capable of being transformed into successful leaders for their organizations, one of the primary sources they turn to is the hallowed halls of hospitality education. The goal of industry executives is to find those individuals possessing advanced skills and qualities that lend to their development into highly talented performers.

The dilemma hospitality education faces is finding the proper balance or combination of theory in the classroom and practical experience through labs and internships. They are challenged to design curriculum with the proper integration of current technologies and theoretical knowledge to provide an education that is not only relevant to the current state of the industry but also one that is forward thinking. As Nelson & Dopson (1999) state, "curriculum relevancy to industry needs is one of the top strategic concerns in hospitality education" (p. 58).

With an uncertain future the pivotal role of higher education described by Barron (2008) becomes even more significant when considering the challenge facing hotel brands striving for the ever-important sustainable competitive advantage. "Superior talent is increasingly recognized as the prime source of sustainable competitive advantage in high performance organizations" (Barron, 2008, p. 731). In view of this consideration the need for assessment of hotel brand talent management expectations becomes apparent. An assessment of expectations relating to talent management by their brands would seem to reveal information consistent with their own expectations and make such an assessment both appropriate and relevant.

The area of focus will be limited to expectations of hotel executives of up-scale and luxury hotels relative to talent management by their brands. By only including expectations of these executives assessment will take into consideration the strategic impact of present and future generations in the workplace. Generation Y represents the current entrants to the workplace and comes with a mixed bag of characteristics. However, the observation "generation Y students have grown up in relative affluence but in an uncertain world" (Barron, 2008, p. 737) provides relevant insight as to some of their inclinations. It becomes particularly fitting, then, for the focus of this study to concentrate on the lodging market segment possessing an environment associated with affluence. Preparing Generation Y to work in this environment can, not only be appealing to them, but relieve some of their uncertainty at the same time.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The challenge of hospitality higher education to find the right mix of practical experience and theoretical knowledge based curriculum is not new. The theme of education meeting the needs and expectations of industry continues into the new millennium and compels researchers to study trends and issues that might provide insight for the future of hospitality education (Nelson & Dopson, 1999; Sigala & Baum, 2003).

Current trends and issues most notably include the impact of technology on both the hospitality industry and hospitality education. Advances in technology have brought about continuing change in the hotel and lodging industry. With learning becoming more technology based, the literature indicates the use of interactive simulation would be effective as both a learning and teaching tool (Martin & McEvoy, 2003) and that "digital based training programs should resonate with Gen Y, for whom work and play are blended achievement and winning matter" (Eisner, 2005, p. 11).

The challenge, as before, will be to determine the optimal content of their curriculum but, unlike before, taking into consideration factors relevant to a generation of students that is truly global, socially conscious and "positioned to be the most demanding" (Eisner, 2005, p. 6). Therefore, revisions to curriculum should contemplate management competencies enabling these students "to utilize these principles on an international basis" (Leong & Hancer, 2010, p. 154). It will also now be more important than ever to infuse elements of innovation and creativity not only into the mix of practical experience and theory but also into the approaches utilized by educators. Barron (2008) points out an increase in the use of technology would be "initial means of engaging and developing Generation Y students" (p. 739). Although not specifically addressing an approach to Gen Y, Sigala & Baum (2003) concluded that educational institutions "should follow a blended mix toward education" (p. 374) by using technology for enhancing and complementing traditional teaching and learning practices. Mixing interactive learning with

traditional classroom lectures, "hands on" laboratory and internship experiences is adapting curriculum almost to the point of being innovative. As Johnson (2009) points out "it is not a question of either innovation or adaptation: it is a matter of doing both simultaneously" (p. 181).

## METHODOLOGY

This study will utilize a web-based survey to collect data relative to the expectations of these hotel and lodging executives.  The survey will consist of questions designed to determine skills and qualities each executive believes are essential for the development of hospitality graduates into highly talented performers capable of being transformed into successful leaders for their organization.  The competencies used by Tas (1988) and Baum (1990) as well as the skills and abilities used by Nelson and Dopson (1999) will be considered in the development of this survey. The selection process will consider skills and competencies relative to contemporary issues, trends and technologies.

## DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

The population for this study will be hotel and lodging executives of up-scale and luxury brands in the United States derived from a database containing members of the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA).  In keeping with the concept of both industry and education being more technology based than at the time previous surveys were conducted, it is only fitting the survey should be web-base administered.

Frequencies will be performed for all skills and competencies.  The mean rating and standard deviation will be used to rank the importance of these skills and competencies as perceived by the respondents.

## EXPECTED FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

It is believed findings will provide additional insight to hospitality education concerning the design of lodging curriculum.  The fact it is industry based information related to what brands expect concerning talent management should carry significant weight.  The final product will provide hospitality education meaningful information to consider as it enters the process of planning curriculum for educating the current generation of hospitality students. This will give hospitality education the opportunity to provide the kind of talent these industry executives expect and need to develop high performers for their organizations in the quest for a sustainable competitive advantage.

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