

Dealing with the staffing crisis

One of the things about working in Hospitality for decades is that I have lived through many staffing crises but this one is as bad as I've ever seen it.

Over the past few years we have had three big hits to contend with:

Brexit
In March this year a report by the Office for National Statistics said that almost 100,000 EU Nationals had left jobs in Hospitality in the two years to June 2021, the highest level of any industry.

Covid
Many staff left Hospitality and are not coming back.

Inflation
A recent Barclays report highlighted a 7% wage increase this year across Hospitality whilst there are currently 400,000 vacancies.

The result is desperation amongst some operators with golden hellos, poaching, restaurants staying closed, hotel rooms not being let etc. So, what can operators do to help deal with all this doom and gloom? I think there is much that can be done to alleviate the situation!

There are two sides to the staffing coin – the demand side - staff required, and



the supply side - staff available. Here are several things you can do on each side of that coin to make a real difference.

Firstly, on the demand side, where the aim is to minimise the staff required:

1. Effective scheduling – forecast at a granular level, by department and by shift and schedule accordingly. Really understand the numbers that your people management system is giving you, even

invest in a 'staffing analyst' – I'm always surprised that many Hospitality groups have well developed disciplines for managing other cost centres e.g. food & drink, utilities, property, etc but not for their biggest cost and driver of customer satisfaction – staff!

2. Remove tasks – many companies are looking hard at all aspects of their customer offer to see what is still relevant.

3. Improve process - through more automation in kitchens, admin, cleaning etc. Removing repetitive work allows staff to focus on added value activity e.g. customer interaction / upselling.

On the supply side, here are three things to maximise output from existing staff:

1. Focus on developing and retaining your core group - which I see as the 'one-year stayers' - through training, promotion, rewards etc. For example, some companies now offer free healthcare insurance for this key staff group, which can be surprisingly cost effective. Report regularly on the percentage of core staff by department to emphasise their importance to the business.

2. Engage with all existing staff - build your tribe, people work for people. Be visible as a leadership team, in person and virtually through your staff's mobiles. When staff go to your app regularly to see their rota, holidays, pay, contract details etc you can also engage them with company updates, promo videos etc. Many companies are putting a real focus on wellbeing, particularly good mental health.

3. Improve the productivity of existing staff. Benchmarking is a huge opportunity - why can one hotel clean a

room in x minutes when another hotel with a similar profile in the same group takes y minutes? Why can one restaurant serve x covers per productive hour at the lunch daypart whereas another can only serve y?

And finally, here are three things you can do to recruit new staff – again to maximise the supply side:

1. Align customer marketing to that of staff marketing. Attract and engage with new staff using the same professionalism, techniques, multiple channels etc that you use to attract and engage with customers. Just as we segment the market and personalise offers for customers, we need to do the same for staff.

2. When advertising for new staff don't over ask for qualifications, as people may be put off applying for a role because they don't think they are qualified when they may well be excellent candidates.

3. Use the visa sponsorship scheme - <https://www.gov.uk/uk-visa-sponsorship-employers>

I know several Hospitality companies that are recruiting kitchen and FOH staff through the visa sponsorship scheme – it's complicated but you should get years of loyalty.

Sum up
The effective delivery of your offer to customers during the ongoing staffing crisis requires both sides of the coin to be managed through minimising the staff required whilst maximising the output from existing staff and recruiting new staff. This will be achieved through a combination of the hard stuff – really understanding and working your staffing numbers, together with the softer stuff – attracting and engaging with staff. The right approaches and systems will help you to do both.

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