

The Don'ts Guide to Hospitality Leadership



One overriding-yet-indirect maxim that has vast implications for leadership development is, “If you aim to do everything good, then you will do nothing great” (often attributed to Zig Ziglar, a famous American salesman). That is, when you try to do too much, the result will be that you’ve overextended yourself and that no singular task gets the attention it needs to make it a genuine success.

While you can undoubtedly see how this adage might apply to other aspects of hospitality – particularly service-oriented operations and marketing – it can nonetheless help to strengthen a hotelier’s leadership style through the process of elimination.

While other literature will often instruct on trying new approaches or adding to your repertoire with tips and tactics for properly managing a team, why not flip the nail on its head and discuss what not to do? In this sense, by learning to abstain from certain activities, you will end up simplifying your day-to-day and focusing on what actually works.

So, for this ‘don’ts guide to hospitality leadership’, each of the four sections starts with what a senior executive is doing wrong then offers a possible course correction involving the removal rather than the addition of specific practices.

The General Numbers Manager

These individual bases everything that he or she does off of data and concentrates on the minutia of what these figures may infer. Such a hotelier makes a habit of perusing daily reports for small variances then, like a weather vane, rapidly responding to any push or pull.

In this day and age, it is all too easy to fall back on the numbers because they can be directly quantified to project cost savings or potential revenue increases. Such temptations are becoming more prevalent as senior executives' bonuses are often structured around how good a P&L looks at the end of the year.

However, we are all in a business that deals with fundamentally irrational beings – otherwise known as people! – thereby rendering omniscient forecasting impossible, no matter what machine learning software or adaptive intelligence algorithms you apply to a given situation. And this problem will only proliferate as we increase the amount of data points that we measure and integrate into our systems.

The first and most obvious step here is to look at the overall trends and what they mean in a broader sense rather than immediately drilling down to each minuscule data point in search of correlations. Along these lines, do not react on a whim to what may or may not be revealed by these numbers. Hospitality is, and will always be, about the people.

The Budgeteer

Closely related to the data-centric individual, everything for this hotelier is based upon whether or not the budget is achieved. Such a person ends up becoming mesmerized by the budget's monthly data, making short-term decisions to reflect each of the twelve parts of the cycle.

Through a gradual process of drinking too much of one's own Kool Aid™, a senior executive with this mentality ultimately becomes exceedingly parsimonious, where all current operations as well as any new initiatives must be reflected in definitive cost figures. All line items must be trimmed and there's always a cheaper way to accomplish a given task, such as frequently changing suppliers or bidding them against one other for the lowest price and replacing long-term staff with temporary labor.

While slashing costs is commendable, a critical drawback is that the guest experience suffers. In a people-oriented business, growth is dependent on the relationships you build – those with your guests as well as those with your suppliers and your team. So, if you are willing to rotate vendors as you would a deck of cards, do you really expect these corporate partners to give you their best? Moreover, such a flippant attitude has a way of reflecting back onto your customers, working to erode your hotel's loyalty.

It may already be obvious, but the principle here is to not be spendthrift to the point where it hinders positive relationship building. Don't focus on pennies; this will only make you pound-foolish, as they say. Instead, much like the saying in the opener, look to only support those programs that you give your full support towards.

Prim and Proper

Such an individual has his or her airs. That is, this person doesn't like to get his or her hands dirty and has no genuine interest in the rest of the frontline team. Often, a hotelier like this will not be receptive to constructive criticism or fresh ideas or will acknowledge them but not truly listen to their meaning and just smile or nod without really caring.

This type of 'elevated management' where the leader view himself or herself above other members with a lower rank has no place in the modern work environment. We are all one team with one goal – to offer our guests an unparalleled guest experience.

So, do not separate yourself from the rest of your staff. On the contrary, assimilate yourself. The more you come to know and empathize with every employee, the more likely your team will be to perform at its best and also to bring forward their ideas which may help keep your organization one step ahead of the competition.

The Desk Master

As a team leader and manager, there will always be another reason to stay put behind your desk with your office door closed. Whether it's a conference call, sorting through emails, browsing daily reports or reviewing long-form documents, we are all highly susceptible to a butt-in-chair approach. What tends to follow, though, is that we become overly structured and by the books, seeking verbatim guidance from brand manuals and unable to think independently.

The general manager position at any hotel is not a desk job. In fact, administrating everything from your office is a surefire way to become out of touch with your operations and all the other quotidian happenings at your property. While forgoing the desk altogether is quite difficult nowadays, strive to make your rounds often if not daily.

After all, a time-honored hallmark of many luxury hotels is the personal attention that each guest receives from senior executives, especially the general manager who is more than likely to be present for both check-in and checkout as well as surprise checkups during mealtime. Do not hide behind your

desk, and instead try leading your hotel from the lobby to deepen your relationships and visibly inspire other team members to be great leaders just like you.